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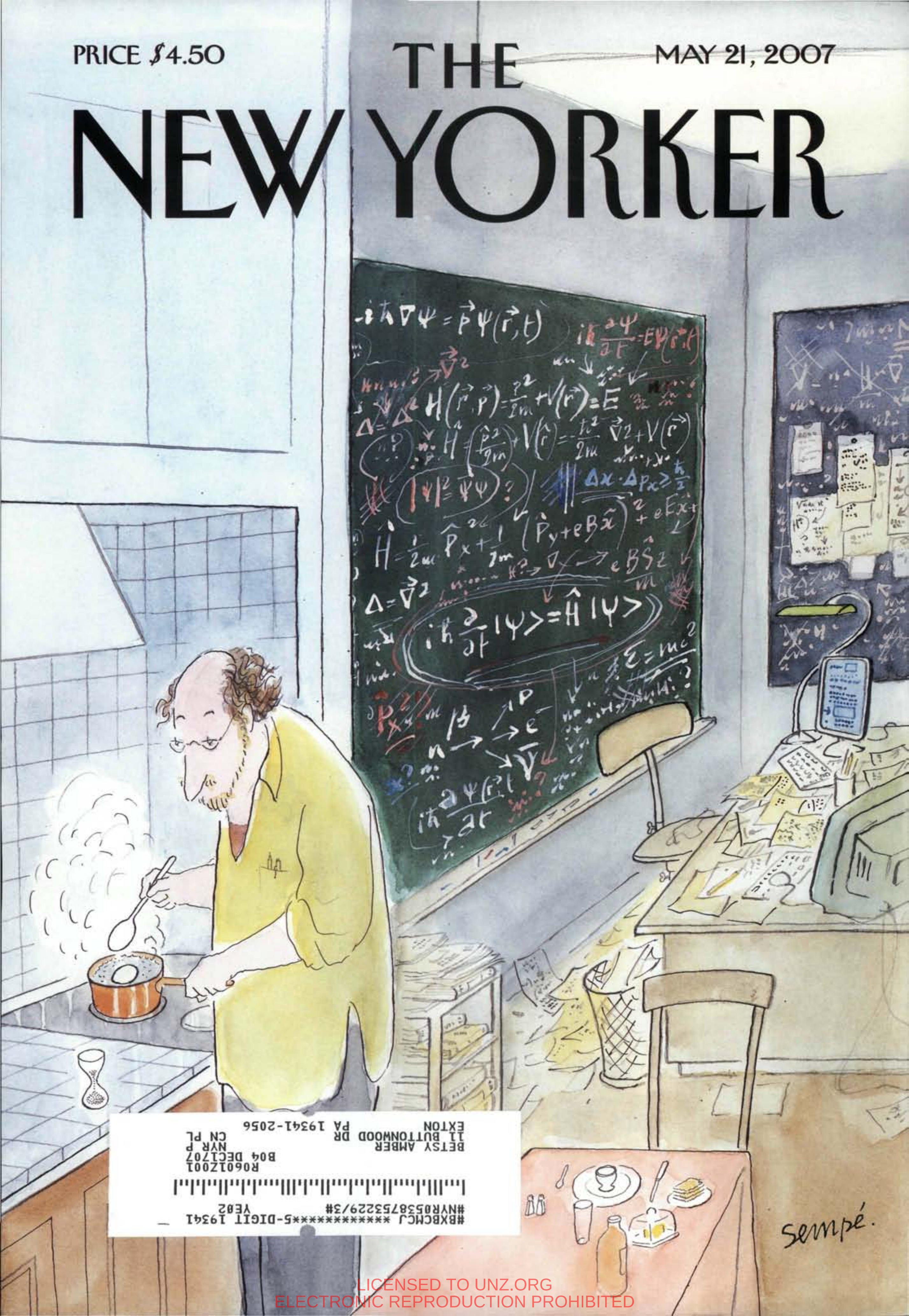
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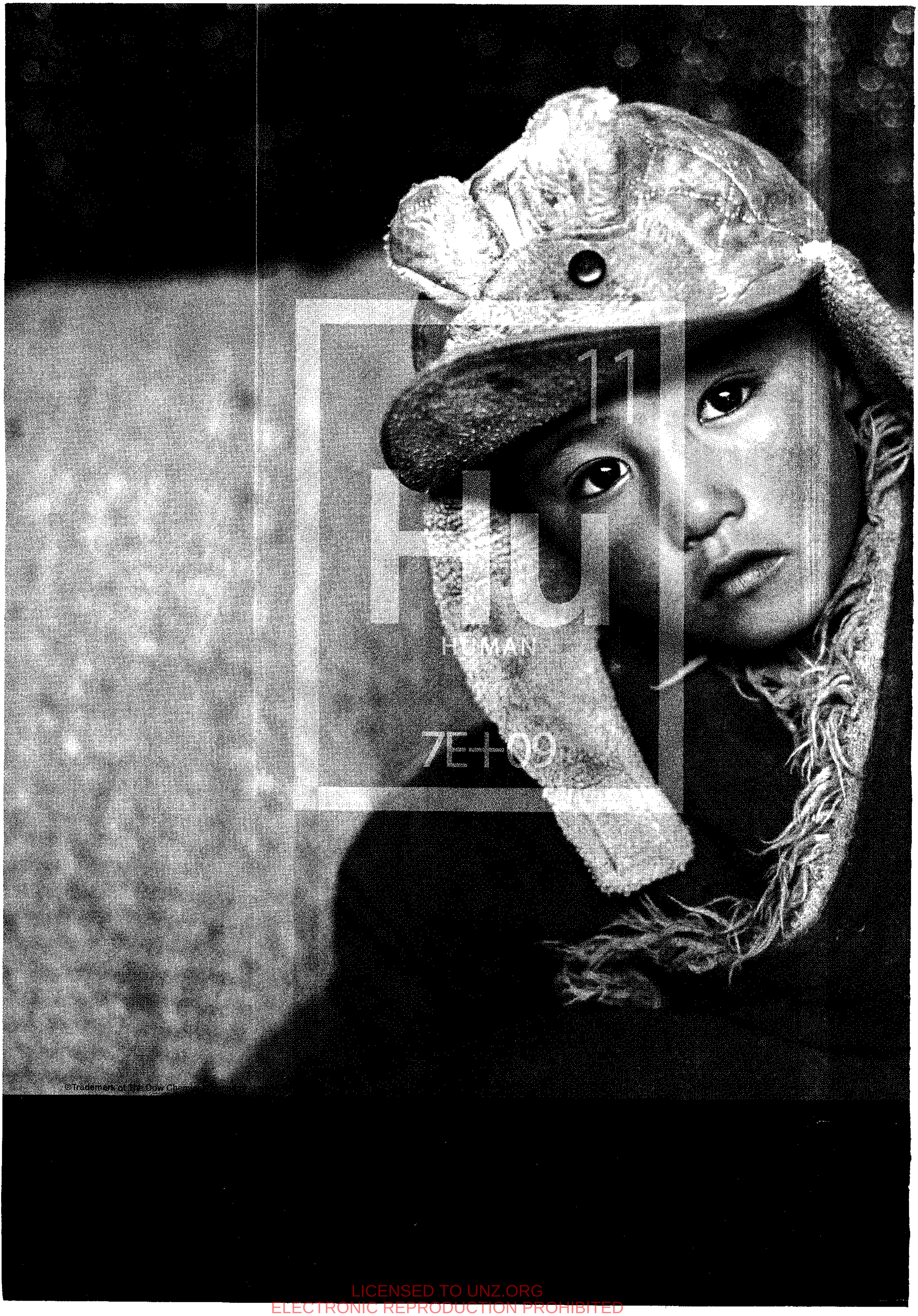
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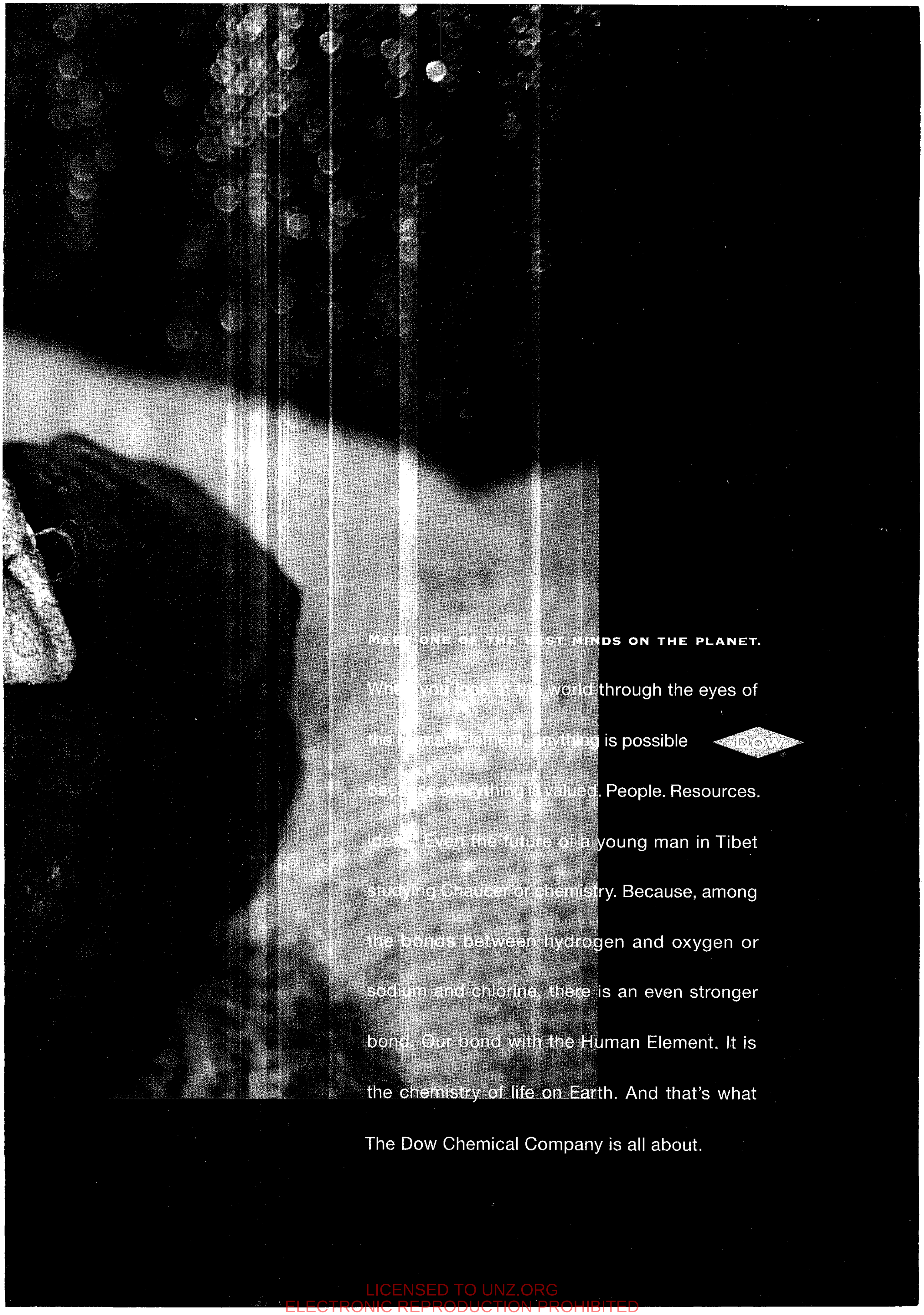

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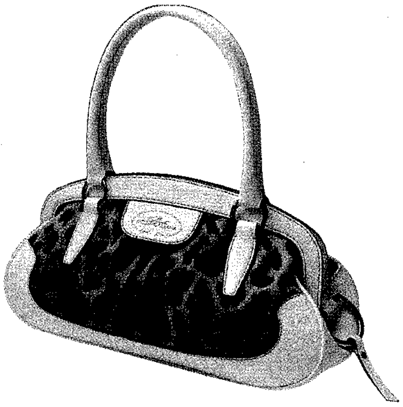

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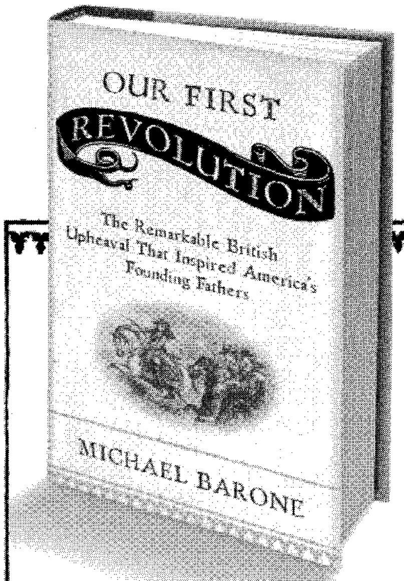
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Peter Hessler ("Walking the Wall," p. 56) is the author of "Oracle Bones: A Journey Through Time in China," which has just been published in paperback.

Nadine Gordimer (Fiction, p. 66), a Nobel laureate, has a short-story collection, "Beethoven Was One-Sixteenth Black," coming out in November.

Anthony Gottlieb (Books, p. 77), a former executive editor of *The Economist*, is the author of "The Dream of Reason: A History of Philosophy from the Greeks to the Renaissance." He is writing a book about nothingness.

Wyatt Mason (Books, p. 82) received a National Magazine Award in 2006 for reviews and criticism.

W. S. Merwin (Poem, p. 78) won the 2005 National Book Award in poetry for "Migration: New and Selected Poems." His new collection, "The Book of Fables," will be published this summer.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Video from "2012: Stories from the Near Future," a conference featuring Arianna Huffington, Cory Booker, Will Wright, and other innovators in conversation with *New Yorker* writers and editors. / An interactive version of *Larry Doyle's* Shouts & Murmurs. / Slide shows of Paul Poiret fashion designs and Edward Hopper paintings. / *Rebecca Mead* discusses the wedding industry. / *Dan Baum* surveys the singular signage of New Orleans. / *Ian Parker* on Christopher Hitchens, and more from the archives. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events.

THE MAIL

ANCIENT ART

Rebecca Mead, in her piece featuring Carlos Picón, the curator of the Greek and Roman department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, quotes him as saying, "How can you tell that it's old? Is there a test? I say there is no test for marble" ("Den of Antiquity," April 9th). While it is true that there is no test that can determine when a marble statue was carved, conservation labs at the Met, the Getty, and the British Museum, among others, have carried out tests many times to determine the source of the marble used in a statue and whether the weathering pattern seen on the surface is natural or man-made. I conducted such tests, for the Getty, on two well-known examples that are now considered questionable. A marble head supposedly by Skopas was found to be made of a marble he never used, and determination of the source of the Getty's famous kouros showed it to be made of marble from an Aegean island, material which was highly unlikely to be used for a kouros of that period and style.

Norman Herz
Honorary Director, Center for Archaeological Sciences
University of Georgia
Athens, Ga.

Picón's views on archeology reflect a deep split among those who study the past through material remains; namely, the "Culture" versus the "culture" camps. The former, which includes Picón, regards fine objects in terms of aesthetic achievement; the latter values field provenance, which is critical to understanding the object's role in society. While this may seem like an arcane divide, the consequences are profound. The breezy attitude regarding looting among many museums is creating huge gaps in our knowledge about the past, as collectible items become commodities. Moreover, this outlook fosters the misconception that there is no direct link between societies past and present. Yet in the Americas, at least, tombs and their contents are not just potential sources of disembodied objects; they are symbols of national patrimony and the resting places of the direct ancestors of people who are still very much with us today.

Charles R. Cobb
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State University of New York at Binghamton
Binghamton, N.Y.

ON GUN CONTROL

Larissa MacFarquhar, in her Profile of Barack Obama, quotes a fellow Harvard Law School student as saying that "Charles Fried, who is very conservative," was a speaker at a class in which the Second Amendment—"the right of the people to keep and bear arms"—came up ("The Conciliator," May 7th). Obama's classmate goes on to say that "Fried is pretty much a Second Amendment absolutist." I may or may not be "very conservative": my work was cited favorably in the Supreme Court's homosexual sodomy case, Lawrence v. Texas, and I have testified in the Senate that I do not believe the Court's 1992 abortion-rights decision should be overruled. But in fact I support strict gun-control legislation. I rarely advert to the Second Amendment in my constitutional-law classes, and when I do mention it I state my view that, if the Second Amendment right is a personal right (rather than one enjoyed by the now obsolete state militias), it is one of those rights (like the obligations of a contract) that government may for good reason regulate or limit, and there is plenty of good reason for most gun-control regulation.

Charles Fried
Beneficial Professor of Law
Harvard Law School
Cambridge, Mass.

•

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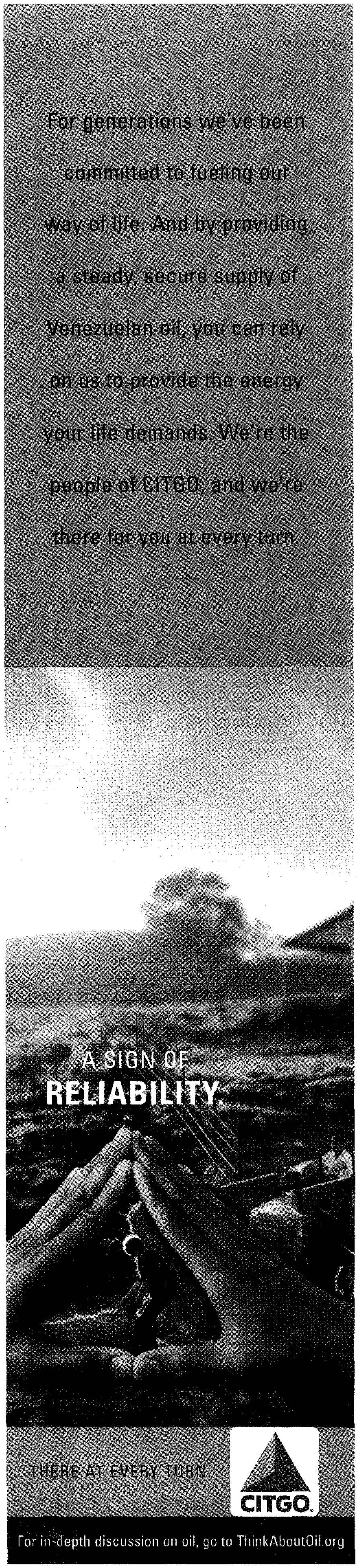
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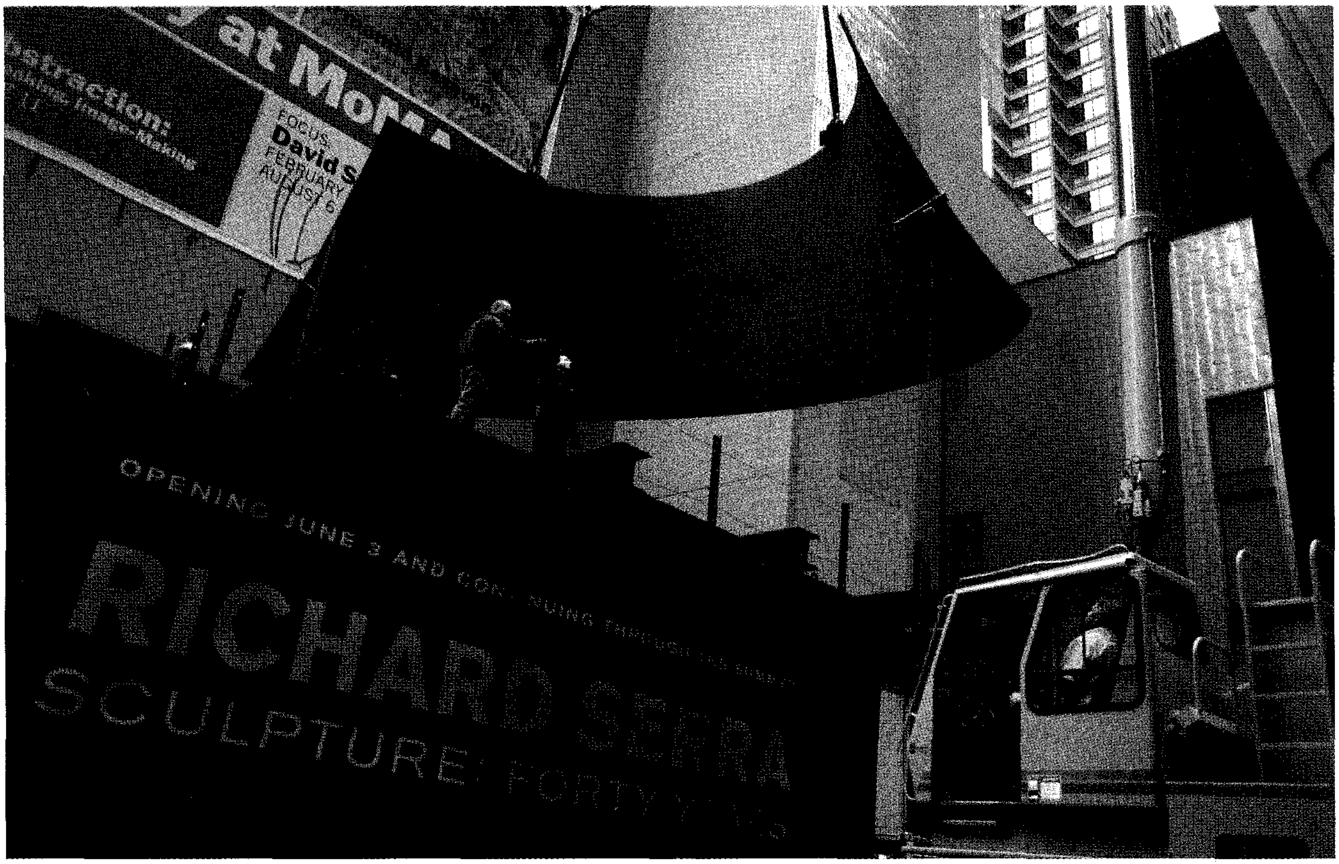

Installing Richard Serra's sculptures at MOMA. Photograph by Gus Powell.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
20	21	22	16	17	18	19

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
DARK TIMES

Frederick Weller and Ron Livingston star in the première of "In a Dark Dark House," a new drama by Neil LaBute. In the play, which begins previews this week at the Lucille Lortel, two brothers quarrel over their conflicting accounts of childhood abuse. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
MAGIC MAN

The Italian pop singer and multi-instrumentalist Vinicio Capossela has a raspy voice and a rabid sense of humor. Known for changing costumes in performance and for constructing dramatic narratives that need no translation, he makes his U.S. début at Joe's Pub. (See page 10.)

ART
FORM AND FUNCTION

Design isn't always about high-end luxury: "Design for the Other 90%" exhibits objects made for people with more pressing needs than cutting-edge iPod docks. Inexpensive devices for purifying and filtering water, hundred-dollar laptops for schoolchildren in developing nations, and easily assembled shelters (many of which were used after Hurricane Katrina) are among the items on display at the Cooper-Hewitt. (See page 14.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
PIECES OF PEACE

The Rubin Museum of Art, a great meeting house for the arts of East and West, presents "Reflections: Beauty Born of Terror," an event conceived by Nine Circles Chamber Theatre which features the cellist Edward Arron, the actor Jay O. Sanders, and music by Messiaen, Prokofiev, and Chen Yi. (See page 18.)

MOVIES
STRANGER THAN LIFE

Always fond of mad adventures, Werner Herzog once walked from Munich to Paris to visit the great film critic Lotte Eisner, and he has long filmed real-life figures in their own quixotic quests. Film Forum offers three weeks of them, beginning with "Little Dieter Needs to Fly," the documentary basis for his upcoming feature "Rescue Dawn," along with works by other directors. (See page 22.)

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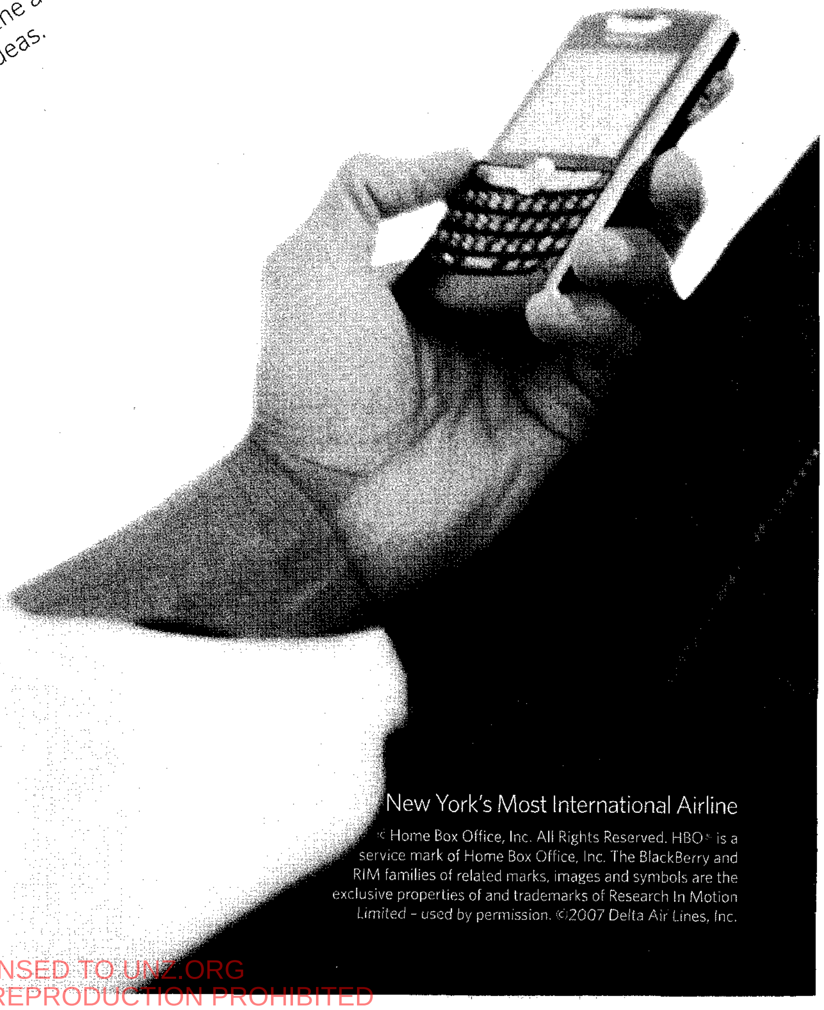

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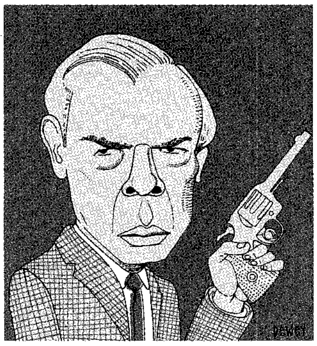
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ONE TOUGH COOKIE

At the emotional-erotic climax of "Point Blank," John Boorman's art-conscious thriller from 1967, Angie Dickinson, playing a civilized moll, whacks Lee Marvin across the shoulders and face again and again, and Marvin just stands there, expressionless, his jaw thrust out, until Dickinson runs out of steam. Later, she creases his noggin with a pool cue right before they make love. Those were the days. Marvin, who was born in New York in 1924, dropped out of high school and served in the Marines (and was seriously wounded) in the Second World War. He got into acting while employed as an apprentice plumber in a Woodstock theatre, and, after much TV work, had an exemplary career in Hollywood as an inexorable tough guy. He had prematurely white hair, a snoutlike nose, feral teeth, and a fabulous voice—dark and textured, like ship's timber—and he got most of his effects by saying no more than a few words and smiling. He died in 1987; nothing like his lethal charm has been seen since. "Point Blank" will be shown on May 17, as part of Lincoln Center's tribute to Marvin, running through May 24.

—*David Denby*



THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

CIRKUS INFERNO
The Ontario-based Daredevil Opera Company presents a vaudeville show, featuring pyrotechnics and an assortment of oddball characters. Opens May 18. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

CLYTEMNESTRA'S TEARS
La Mama and the Greek Persona Theatre Company present a one-woman show, starring Themis Bazaka, based on the tragedy of the wife of Agamemnon. Written and directed by Avra Sidiropoulou. In Greek, with English supertitles. Previews begin May 17. Opens May 20. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

CRAZY MARY
Sigourney Weaver stars in a new play by A. R. Gurney, about a wealthy woman and her son visiting a cousin in a mental institution. Jim Simpson directs. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

DON'T QUIT YOUR NIGHT JOB
Kristin Chenoweth, Tony Roberts, Sutton Foster, and Bebe Neuwirth are among the rotating guest stars for this improv show conceived and performed by Steve Rosen, David Rossmer, Sarah Saltzberg, and Dan Lipton. In previews. Opens May 17. (HA! Comedy Club, 163 W. 46th St. 212-868-4444.)

GASLIGHT
Charlotte Moore directs Patrick Hamilton's Victorian psychological thriller from 1938, which was originally titled "Angel Street" before it was adapted for film, twice, in the early forties. In previews. Opens May 17. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

I.E., IN OTHER WORDS
At the Flea, the première of a play by Mark Greenfield, about a young man pursuing his dreams. Previews begin May 17. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

IN A DARK DARK HOUSE
MCC Theatre presents the world première of Neil LaBute's new play. Ron Livingston and Frederick Weller star; Carolyn Cantor directs. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

THE KAROL WOJTYLA THEATRE FESTIVAL
This series, featuring plays written by Wojtyla, who went on to become Pope John Paul II, begins with "The Jeweler's Shop," which opens May 16. (Storm Theatre, 145 W. 46th St. 212-868-4444.)

PHALLACY
A drama by the scientist Carl Djerassi, about an art historian whose prized sculpture is discovered to be of much more recent origin than she had believed it to be. Directed by Elena Araoz. In previews. Opens May 18. (Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

THE ROMANCE OF MAGNO RUBIO
A Ma-Yi Theatre Company production of a play by Lonnie Carter, about a Filipino migrant worker in nineteen-thirties California. Loy Arcenas directs. Previews begin May 19. (Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.)

TEA
Japanese war brides reflect on their lives in this play by Velina Hasu Houston, directed by Tina Chen. Previews begin May 20. (West End Theatre, 263 W. 86th St. 212-352-3101.)

10 MILLION MILES
Atlantic Theatre Company presents the première of a new musical featuring music and lyrics by Patty Griffin, about a young man and woman on a road trip from Florida to upstate New York. Keith Bunin wrote the book; Michael Mayer directs. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

BETROTHED
The director Rachel Dickstein weaves a dreamy, enchanting dance-theatre piece out of three culturally distant tales of women whose yearning doesn't seem to fit any pattern of earthly marriage. The stories—set in India, Russia, and the Jewish Diaspora—change mood with a few graceful shifts of lighting. Using stylized, evocative physical storytelling and verbal narration to create a sense of pageantry, Dickstein evokes the plight of the would-be brides, each seeking a salve for her ardent and troubled heart. One heroine (Mahira Kakkar) is prone to epileptic fits that scare off any potential suitors; another falls in love with a penniless Kabbalist whose soul returns after death to possess her body. Dickstein's cast enacts each story with glowing fullness, and Vijay Iyer's liquid music shimmers throughout. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

BIOGRAPHY
A sense of comic satisfaction is what the audience takes away from the splendid revival of S. N. Behrman's 1932 hit, well cast and well directed by J. R. Sullivan. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/7/07.) (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. Through May 20.)

"BRITS OFF BROADWAY"
The annual festival of British theatre includes "The Receipt," by Will Adamsdale and Chris Branch, "Memory," written by Jonathan Lichtenstein and directed by the Tony nominee Terry Hands, and "Silverland," by Benjamin Davis. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

CORAM BOY
A costume melodrama with a mad heart. Helen Edmundson's adaptation of Jamila Gavin's young-adult novel, set in England in the mid-eighteenth century, has been given a hair-raising staging by Melly Still, in a transfer of her National Theatre production. The plot elements are straight out of Dickens—repressive fathers, orphans lost and found, a dastardly villain (played with relish by Bill Camp)—but the grandeur and dark wit of Still's direction paints it all anew. Still doesn't comment on the limits of the genre but amplifies everything that lies within it, to nightmarish effect. Her imagery points to a grimness that doesn't always pan out in the story, but it is indelible, and frightening, nonetheless. Featuring a twenty-person choir, a flying angel, and a transfixing sequence set under the sea. (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

DAUGHTER OF A CUBAN REVOLUTIONARY
INTAR presents Marissa Chibas's account of the lives of her father, who worked with Fidel Castro; her uncle, who ran for the Cuban Presidency in 1951 and whose suicide was broadcast live on the radio; and her mother, a Miss Cuba contestant. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

DEUCE
The pleasures of Terrence McNally's new play are clear from the outset, as one watches the gracious Marian Seldes and the tart Angela Lansbury step into the skins of a pair of retired tennis players who were a champion doubles team. McNally's alternately snappy and sentimental character study places Midge and Leona in the bleachers of the U.S. Open, where, having come to receive an honorary citation, they explore their shared past. Three decades before, they won multiple titles with competitive zest, forcing a skeptical public to take notice of women's tennis as a real sport, not just as a genteel hobby for the garden-party set. Michael Blakemore directs the two sardonic old pros, whose onstage rapport is feisty and unfeigned. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

DIXIE'S TUPPERWARE PARTY
Up from her trailer home in Mobile, Alabama, Dixie Longate (Kris Andersson, who also wrote the piece), a drag performer who in real life became Tupperware's top salesperson, demonstrates her wares with a loopy enthusiasm, a foul mouth, and many more gay and lesbian references than one suspects might be common at such gatherings. Andersson is particularly adept at audience interactions, which include raffles, contests, and gentle humiliations. Directed by Alex Timbers, the staging and performing

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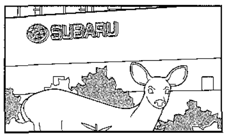

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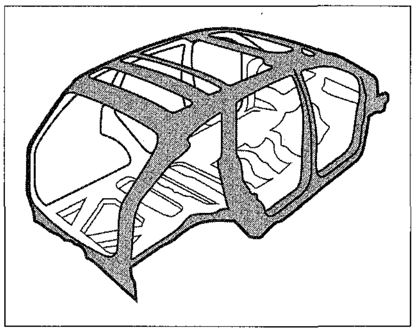

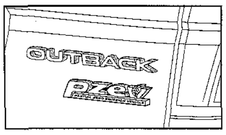

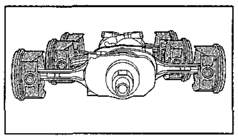

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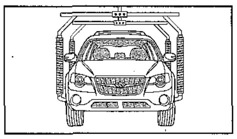

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are fresh, but the whole thing still tastes like leftovers. (Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

GOD'S EAR
New Georges presents the première of a play by Jenny Schwartz, about a couple mourning the loss of their young son. Directed by Anne Kauffman. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-868-4444.)

110 IN THE SHADE
Roundabout Theatre Company's production of the musical by Harvey Schmidt, Tom Jones, and N. Richard Nash. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.)

LOVEMUSIK
In this theatrical dramatization of the marriage of Lotte Lenya (Donna Murphy) and the composer Kurt Weill (Michael Cerveris), the writer Alfred Uhry and the legendary director Harold Prince rely on a great deal of explication to get their points across. Employing techniques that Brecht made famous in his epic theatre—projecting slides that announce the setting for the action we are about to see, punctuating the drama with Weill's songs—Prince clearly knows what he's doing. But one can't help feeling that, for the most part, he's dressing up a turkey. Murphy plays Lenya's grief as she plays most of the part: by rote, and with no discernible understanding of the emotional complexity that ran through the real woman's performances. Cerveris is equally miscast: he's too powerful for the part of Weill. "LoveMusik," despite its great performers, great music, and great director, is pure packaging. (5/14/07) (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE NEW GROUP (NAKED)
The New Group offshoot company presents two works in repertory: "Strangers Knocking," by Robert Tenges, and "Expats," by Heather Lynn MacDonald. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

PASSING STRANGE
The singer-songwriter Stew wrote the book and lyrics for this musical, about a young black bohemian's search for himself. Annie Dorsen directs; with choreography by Karole Armitage. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

PRETTY CHIN UP
A LAByrinth Theatre Company developmental production of a satire by Andrea Ciannavei, about a corpulent executive and the model selling the diet pills he markets. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

RADIO GOLF
The final installment in August Wilson's ten-play cycle, set in Pittsburgh's Hill District. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

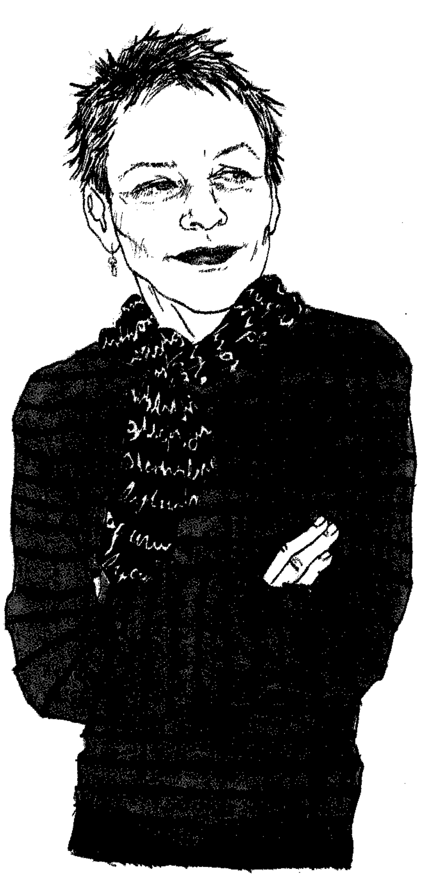
Also Playing

AMERICAN FIESTA: Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. Through May 20. **BLACKBIRD:** City Center, Stage I, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **THE BRIG:** Living Theatre, 19-21 Clinton St. 212-352-3101. **COMPANY:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **FROST/NIXON:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **GREY GARDENS:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **INHERIT THE WIND:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** 37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100. **THE J.A.P. SHOW, JEWISH AMERICAN PRINCESSES OF COMEDY:** Actor's Temple Theatre, 339 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **JOURNEY'S END:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **SMOKE AND MIRRORS:** Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. **SPALDING GRAY: STORIES LEFT TO TELL:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-7171. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **TALK RADIO:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BEACON THEATRE
Broadway at 75th St. (212-307-7171)—May 21-22: In 1967, the guitarist Walter Becker and the pianist Donald Fagen met at Bard College and began a musical and songwriting partnership that eventually led to the formation of **Steely Dan,** perhaps the hippest and smartest rock band of the seventies, and certainly one of the most successful. Live performances were rare, but the group scored hits with "Do It Again," "Reelin' in the Years," "Rikki Don't Lose That Number," "Peg," and "Hey Nineteen"—songs that didn't shy away from unusual harmonies, uneven rhythms, jazzy instrumentation, and snide, insinuating lyrics (perfect for Fagen's snide, insinuating lead vocals). Through the eighties and nineties, Steely Dan was more or less nonexistent, but they've released a couple of albums of new material since 2000, and the current Heavy Rollers tour, with a ten-piece band, is their biggest ever.



The performance artist Laurie Anderson, at the Highline Ballroom.

HOPE GANGLOFF

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—May 16: The electro-funk ensemble **!!!** (which can be pronounced "chick chick chick") has been around since 1996, but it didn't really get its groove on until after the start of the new century, when it recorded the song "Me and Giuliani Down by the Schoolyard." The party continues with its newly released third album, "Myth Takes." May 18: **Psychic TV,** the brainchild of the gender-blurring transgressive mastermind Genesis P-Orridge, dates back to the late seventies. The creation of P.T.V. (as it is known to fans) followed the implosion of the infamous British industrial ensemble Throbbing Gristle. Whereas the latter excelled at producing nausea-inducing noise, P.T.V. branched out into pop and dance music, infusing hypnotic club tracks with surreal psychedelia and pulsing beats. Ever a magnet for scrutiny and misinterpretation, P-Orridge and P.T.V. remain furiously prolific and impossible to pin down.

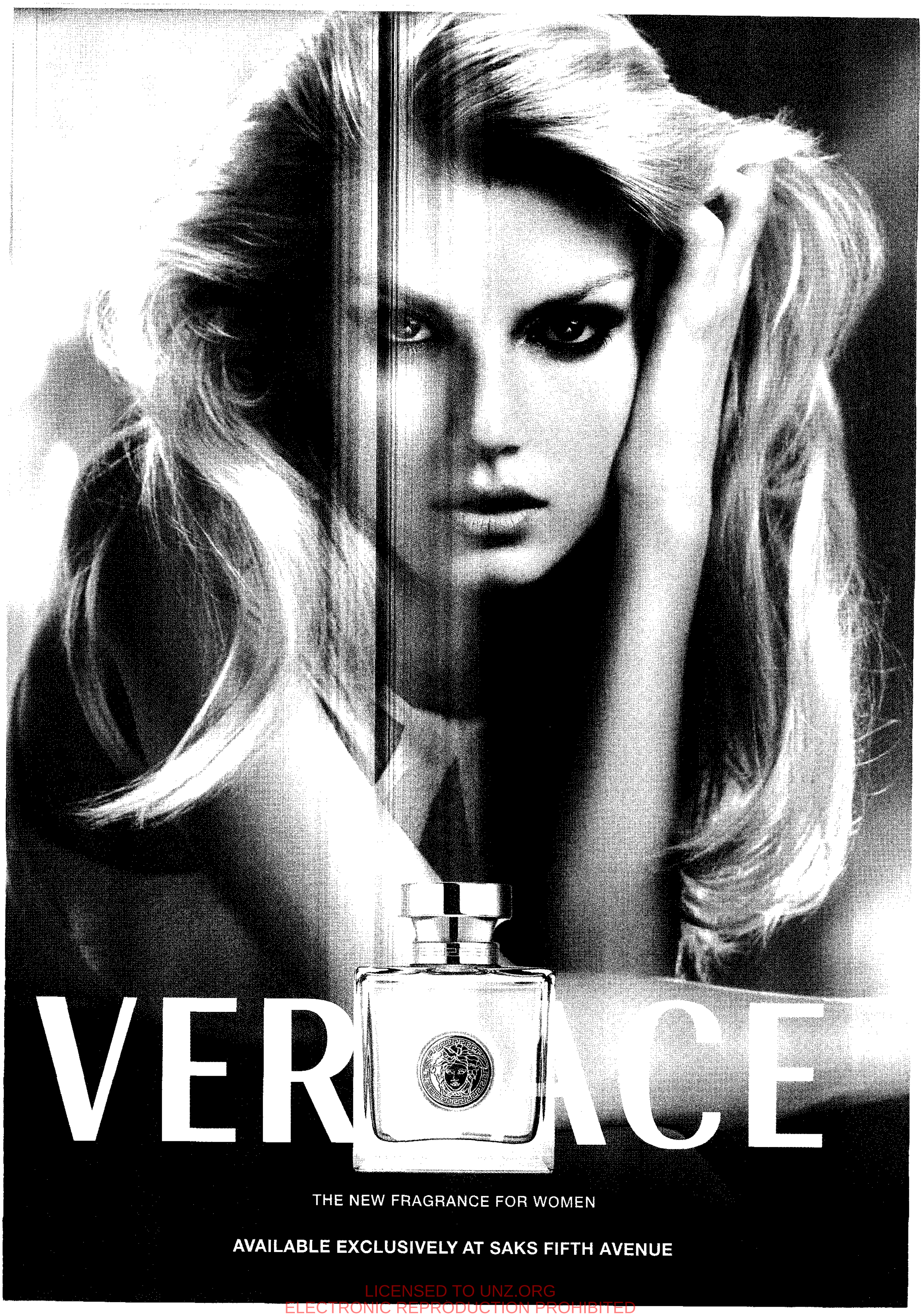
HIGH LINE FESTIVAL
The new arts festival, whose purpose is to help support efforts to turn the defunct West Side elevated freight railway into a park, wraps up this week with shows at the Highline Ballroom by **Laurie Anderson** and the **Secret Machines** (see below), and performances at other venues. The British comedian **Ricky Gervais** is also making his first U.S. standup appearance, at the Theatre at Madison Square Garden, on May 19. (For more information, visit www.highlinefestival.com.)

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—May 17-18: **Laurie Anderson's** performances are not the multimedia events that they used to be, but they do hit on a variety of levels. Her small group (usually a trio, though her husband, Lou Reed, has been known to sit in) creates a blend of keyboard, synthesizer, violin, and guitar sounds, sometimes rhythmic, sometimes breaking through the strictures of time signatures and achieving a meditative euphoria. But the most arresting instrument in the band is Anderson's voice. Often, she's not singing so much as speaking in pitch, every word precisely presented, offering lyrics that are epigrammatic, politically and culturally astute, funny, and cosmic. To quote from "Transitory Life," one of her recent compositions, "It takes a long time for a mouse to realize he's in a trap, but, once he does, something inside him never stops shaking." (Part of the High Line Festival.) May 19: The **Secret Machines** started off as a Texas trio, then decamped to Brooklyn to bring their sprawling sound and sense-engulfing live shows to a larger audience. After two popular and critically acclaimed major-label albums, the guitarist Benjamin Curtis has announced that he is heading out on his own. The band, known for a prog-ish, stentorian approach, is now entering a new phase. (Part of the High Line Festival.)

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—May 16: The singer-songwriter **Suzanne Vega** still has the distinctive voice that helped lodge her song "Luka" deep in the popular consciousness, twenty years ago. Since then, she's turned out a series of insightful albums; her latest, "Beauty & Crime," which is due out in July, is a tribute to her home town, New York City. Later on May 16: The local geek-rock heroes **They Might Be Giants** celebrate the release of their new album, "The Else." May 17: **Spottiswoode and His Enemies.** Jonathan Spottiswoode, the backbone of this tight group, has a deep, rough-hewn voice that's evocative of Leonard Cohen's. He writes astringent ballads and groovy pop songs with equal aplomb. May 22: The Italian singer-songwriter **Vinicio Capossela.** Like a mystical cross between Tom Waits and John Cleese, Capossela limns a wry, topsy-turvy musical universe on his latest studio release, "Ovunque Proteggi" ("May You Protect Me Everywhere"). A man of many talents—his 2004 novel, "Non Si Muore Tutte le Mattine" ("You Don't Die Every Morning"), was a best-seller—he is known for captivating theatrical performances.

LIVING ROOM
154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7235)—May 17: The singer-songwriter **Noam Weinstein** writes ornate ballads that range from the sentimental to the humorous (and sometimes are both). A regular member of the local indie-pop scene, he's a hard-working entertainer who, in a different decade (say, the seventies), would easily be working bigger rooms.

LUNA LOUNGE
361 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn (718-384-7112)—May 19: **RTX,** the hard-rocking outfit led by Jennifer Herrema, formerly of Royal Trux. May 20: The instrumental trio **Big Lazy** returns after a period of hibernation, with a new drummer and an impressive, bittersweet album called "Postcards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from X." Led by the elegant guitarist Stephen Ulrich, the band's new material consists mostly of dark songs featuring Ulrich's reverb-and-tremelo-drenched playing backed by junk-yard grooves from the rhythm section.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—May 16: When, exactly, did **Elvis Costello** become one of pop music's best vocalists? Rocker, songwriter, guitarist, interpreter, genre experimenter, master collaborator—he has played all these roles. In recent years, Costello has sung duets locally with Lucinda Williams, Emmylou Harris, Rosanne Cash, and Allen Toussaint, and he's held back a touch so as not to blow them off the stage. Appearing with the Imposters (featuring the longtime conspirators Steve Nieve on keyboards and Pete Thomas on drums, with the relative newcomer Davey Faragher on bass), and drawing on a catalogue stretching back thirty years, he'll have no need to hold back here. May 19: Burly, experimental post-rock collides with old-school prog-rock in the enigmatic **Porcupine Tree**, from the U.K. The group's latest album, "Fear of a Blank Planet," includes fifty-minute suites and contributions from Alex Lifeson, of Rush, and Robert Fripp, of King Crimson. May 22: **Velvet Revolver**, which features the former Stone Temple Pilots vocalist Scott Weiland and the Guns N' Roses vets Duff McKagan, Matt Sorum, and Slash, is still seeking to make good on its impressive pedigree.

TABLES FOR TWO
BROWN CAFÉ

61 Hester St. (212-477-2427)—It's been said that people look like their dogs, but they can also take after their restaurants. For instance, at brunch on a recent Sunday afternoon at Brown Café there was not a blond in sight. Instead, the hip storefront (metal grate still visible, no sign) was filled with hip, hungover customers devouring *pain au chocolat* and eleven kinds of eggs. They wore sneakers with Velcro, and sunglasses inside; they tended to be of the dark, attractive, bedheaded type. An Italian papa perched his bambino on the back of a Vespa parked outside. The scene was momentarily intimidating. But what if you sat down with the beautiful people and they were really, really nice?

"I'd go for the Albariño," a hostess said, recommending one of the menu's least expensive bottles of white wine. Her easy sophistication mirrored that of her boss, Alejandro Alcocer, who as a teenager left Mexico City, where he was born, to follow the waves. Somewhere along the way, he learned how to cook. Having fallen in with the sort of creative nomads whose line of work necessitates craft services, he opened Green, a largely organic catering business, in 2000. Brown followed, next door. Orange, housed in the same Chinatown compound, is an *épicerie* that offers mortadella, freshly baked *filone*, and Catalonian cheeses in a neighborhood where it might be easier to find a live turtle.

Dinner at Brown is a relaxed, generous affair, one that you might imagine happening on a good night at a great friend's house. The rustic wooden tables are pocked with knife marks and rings from drinks long drunk. Flank steak—a treat to encounter—is left deliciously pink and served with caramelized shallots, or on pillowy focaccia, as a sandwich. An octopus salad is so fresh as to be almost unadulterated, while the venison loin marinates in "foaming butter," the smell of which suffuses the entire room. For dessert, there's apple crisp, drizzled with honey and powdered sugar, and mascarpone, chestnut, and peanut-butter gelato (which even crunches). A blueberry tart is so gorgeous that you hate to touch it. Until you do. (Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Entrées $10-$24.)

—Lauren Collins

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—May 16-19: The saxophonist and clarinet player **Paquito D'Rivera**, who balances a festive nature with exacting virtuosity, continues his forays into the worlds of Latin, jazz, and classical music.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—May 15-20: Whether taking on standards, Disney classics, or holiday favorites, **Steve Tyrell** imbues it all with the mirth of a successful late bloomer who still can't quite believe his good fortune.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—May 15: Leaving his baton at home, the conductor **André Previn** takes a sentimental journey back to his days as a popular jazz pianist, in the fifties. The early show features a solo performance. It is followed by the guitarist **Bucky Pizzarelli** and the bassist **Jay Leonhart**. May 18-20: The saxophonist **Joe Lovano** brings in his nonet, featuring the pianist **Hank Jones**. The group's new recorded collaboration, "Kids: Duets Live at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola," captures the members' uncanny ability to cultivate the most telling lyrical attributes in one another's playing.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—May 17-20: The vocalist **Paula West**.

MERKIN CONCERT HALL
129 W. 67th St. (212-501-3303)—May 19: The ambitious new-jazz pianist and composer **Vijay Iyer** plays duets with the Chicago-based keyboardist **Amina Claudine Meyers**, the percussionist **Suphala**, and his frequent associate the saxophonist **Rudresh Mahanthappa.**

SMOKE
2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. (212-864-6662)—May 18-19: The **Grant Stewart** quartet. Stewart wields a tenor saxophone with hard-bop brawn and fluid melodicism on his new album, "In the Still of the Night." His support players include the pianist **Tardo Hammer** and the drummer **Joe Farnsworth**, two important factors in the album's success.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—May 15-20: The **Renee Rosnes** quartet. The pianist Rosnes, who came of age supporting Joe Henderson and other heavyweight saxophonists, is joined by the poised alto-sax and flute player **Steve Wilson**, the drummer **Bill Stewart**, and the bassist **Peter Washington**. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Poiret: King of Fashion,"** a survey of the career of the Parisian designer Paul Poiret (1879-1944), is at the Costume Institute through Aug. 5. ♦ The Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Roof Garden has reopened for the summer, with Frank Stella as the featured artist. Recent works in stainless steel and carbon fibre will be on view outdoors through Oct. 28. Indoors, **"Frank Stella: Painting Into Architecture"** presents the prolific artist's designs for architectural structures. Through Aug. 5. ♦ The Met's new permanent Greek and Roman galleries are now open. ♦ **"Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797."** Through July 8. ♦ **"Barcelona and Modernity: Gaudí to Dalí."** Through June 3. ♦ **"Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall: An Artist's Country Estate."** Through May 20. ♦ **"Flowing Streams: Scenes from Japanese Art and Life."** Through June 3. ♦ **"One of a Kind: The Studio Craft Movement."** Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Accordions and Harmonicas of the Nineteenth Century."** Through Sept. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Picasso's Demoiselles d'Avignon at 100"** celebrates the centenary of the iconic painting, which makes its home at MOMA, with preparatory drawings and related works. Through Aug. 27. ♦ **"Projects 85: Dan Perjovschi."** Through Aug. 27. ♦ **"Artistic Collaborations: Fifty Years at Universal Limited Art Editions."** Through May 21. ♦ **"Live/Work: Performance Into Drawing."** Through May 21. ♦ **"Comic Abstraction: Image Making, Image Breaking."** Through June 11. ♦ Ten large recent photographic works will be on view in **"Barry Frydlender: Place and Time."** Opens May 17. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Hugo Boss Prize 2006: Tacita Dean."** Through June 6. ♦ **"The Shapes of Space"** will open in stages throughout the summer, as restoration work on the Guggenheim's flagship building progresses. Among the works will be installations by Pipilotti Rist, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Piotr Ulanski. Through Sept. 5. ♦ **"Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum: Restoring a Masterpiece."** Through July 8. ♦ **"Divisionism/Neo-Impressionism: Arcadia and Anarchy."** Through Aug. 6. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Lincoln Kirstein"** honors the late, great aesthete, connoisseur, and impresario on the centenary of his birth, with an exhibition of work by three artists he championed: Walker Evans, Elie Nadelman, and Pavel Tchelitchew. Through Aug. 27. ♦ **"Gordon Matta-Clark: You Are the Measure."** Matta-Clark is a tricky subject for history. He completed one hectic decade of mature work before dying, of cancer, at the age of thirty-five, in 1978. His major works—abandoned buildings cut into walk-in sculpture—have all been demolished. What remains are films, photocollages, drawings, and sculptural fragments of the building cuts. But, even in their capacity as remnants, these tell a vivid story of brash and savvy adventures in what Matta-Clark called "anarchitecture." Through June 3. ♦ **"Taryn Simon: An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar."** Through June 24. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Kindred Spirits: Asher B. Durand and the American Landscape."** Through July 29. ♦ The inaugural exhibition in the new Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, **"Global Feminisms,"** gathers work made since 1990 by eighty-seven women in more than fifty countries. Co-curated by Maura Reilly and the venerable feminist art historian Linda Nochlin—who, in 1971, rocked the discipline with her polemic "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"—the show is brilliant in places, discursive in others, as any survey aspiring to global scope must be. Video stands out. Don't miss Emily Jacir's simple and sick-making chronicle of walking to work across a contested Palestinian border (she shot the film through a hole in her handbag); or Julia Loktev's collaboration with Vito Acconci, which slyly cites his performances from the sixties and seventies; or Tracey Moffatt's "Love," a relentless stream of movie

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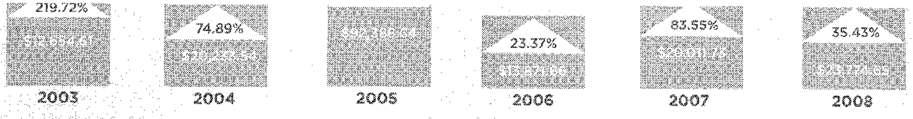

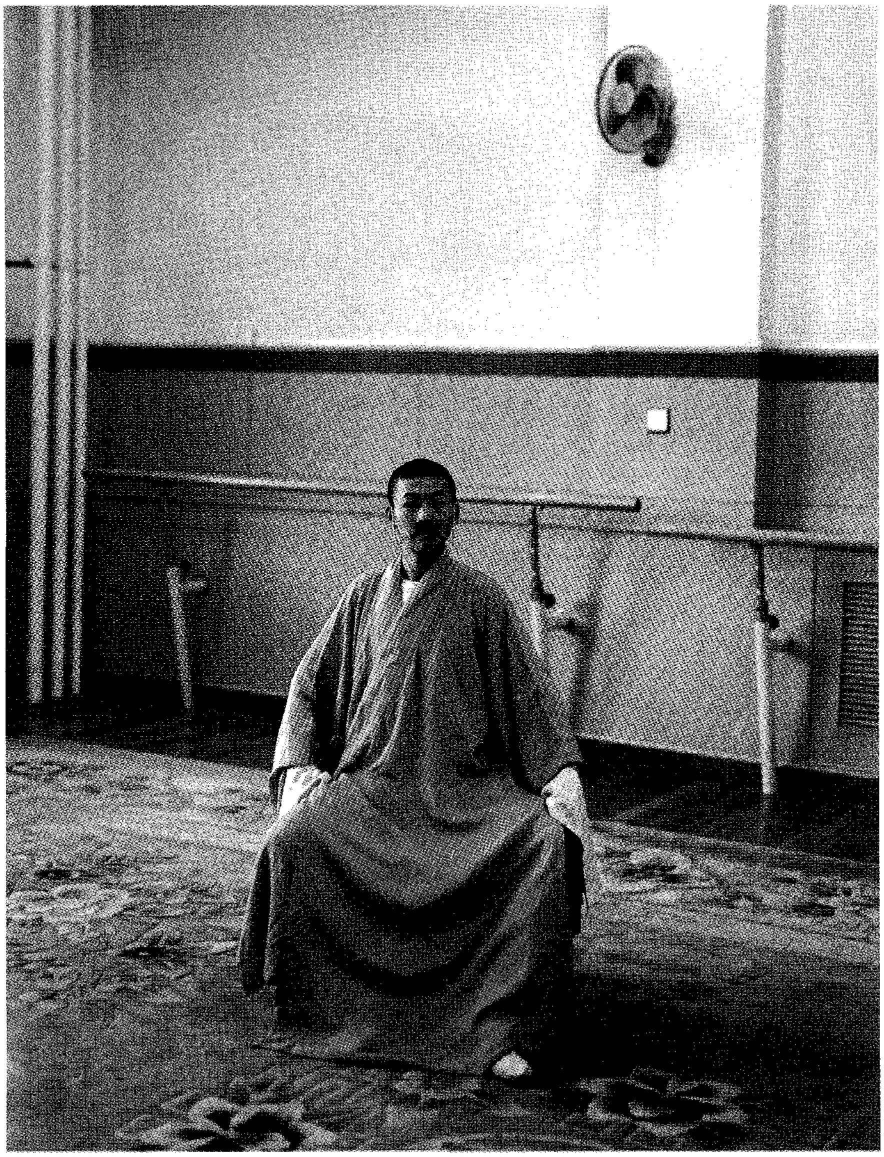

Tina Barney's "The Opera Student," from her show "China Visit," at Borden.

clips that fetishizes collapsing romances and revenge. Through July 1. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Glass, Gilding, and Grand Design: Art of Sasanian Iran (224-642)."** Iran's last pre-Islamic empire is examined through its opulent courtly art. Through May 20. ♦ For the exhibition **"Collectors' Choice,"** thirteen Asian-art aficionados from around the country have loaned the cream of their collections. Don't miss the Yongle-era Ming-dynasty ceramics: the white-glazed ewer and vase with barely perceptible incised patterns of flowers are marvels of elegance and restraint. Through Aug. 26. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Design Life Now: National Design Triennial 2006."** Through July 29. ♦ **"Made to Scale: Staircase Masterpieces."** A collection of staircase models, mostly from nineteenth-century France. Through June 3. ♦ **"Design for the Other 90%"** is an exhibition of low-cost useful objects for people seldom served by the design industry: those lacking potable water, safe food, shelter, transportation, and other basics. Through Sept. 23. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"George Stubbs (1724-1806): A Celebration."** Through May 27. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Van Gogh and Expressionism."** Through July 2. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"A New Light on Tiffany."** Through July 4. ♦ **"Audubon's Aviary: Natural Selection."** The museum's third exhibition of watercolors made in preparation for the mammoth, seven-volume text "Birds of America" is accompanied by videos, artifacts, and recordings of the birds' songs. Through May 20. ♦ **"The World of Asher B. Durand: The Artist in Antebellum New York."** Through Sept. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

JOHN CONSTABLE
A show of sketches painted in the years before Constable's wife, Maria, died, in 1828. The thesis of the show is twofold: first, that the couple's honeymoon, in the South of England in 1816, was a catalyst for Constable's shift to a brighter palette and more painterly brushwork; and, second, that his painting grew darker after what he described as the "loss of my departed Angel-God." While not exactly a museum-ready exhibition, "Constable Oil Sketches: The Maria Bicknell Years (1809-1829)" comes close, with several works on loan from the Met, the Frick, the Tate, the Victoria and Albert, and the Yale Center for British Art which feature his distinctive, carefully studied clouds and cows and emerald-green fields. Through June 16. (Salander-O'Reilly, 22 E. 71st St. 212-879-6606.)

WILLEM DE KOONING
The teeth-gnashing, big-hipped gals are back in this modest-sized show built around a single impressive, electric-hued "Woman" painting from 1949, on loan from a private collection. Part pinup girl, part Venus of Willendorf, de Kooning's "Women" have incited controversy for everything from bringing figurative painting back into the fold during the heyday of abstraction to offending feminists. And maybe de Kooning did have a few problems with women. What you feel more than anything in the presence of these smudged, scrawled, deeply gestural pencil and charcoal drawings from the late forties and early fifties, however, is the artist's roughhouse engagement with art history and his medium. Through June 8. (Starr, 5 E. 73rd St. 212-570-1739.)

"PICASSO, BRAQUE, AND EARLY FILM IN CUBISM"
This exhibition, which explores the effect of movies on Cubism between 1907 and 1914, presents the two leading practitioners of the style as film buffs. Portraits and still-lifes are considered in the context of camera angles and lighting, fades and dissolves. It's a thesis that makes sense, given the weekly moviegoing habits of the Picasso crowd, and considering nearly monochrome gray and dun-colored canvases like Picasso's "Still Life with a Bottle of Rum" (borrowed from the Met) and Braque's "Mandora" (on loan from the Tate), which mimic the palette of early cinema. The vintage cameras and bits of film projected in the gallery are nice touches, too. Through June 23. (PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292.)

Short List

DON DOE: Mosler, 35 E. 67th St. 212-249-4195. Through June 16. **WILLIAM KLEIN:** Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through June 2. **JAMES WELLING:** Horticultural Society of New York, 148 W. 37th St., 13th fl. 212-757-0915, ext. 113. Through June 29. **"THE END IS NIGH":** Higher Pictures, 764 Madison Ave., at 65th St. 212-249-6100. Through May 19.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

JOSEPH CORNELL
A selection of collages and assemblages featuring Cornell's characteristic oddities: a weathered wooden box holding a broken goblet filled with yellow sand; found images of constellations and songbirds mixed with Old Master reproductions and allusions to French Surrealism (even though Cornell never travelled to Europe, or, for that matter, west of New Jersey). The show also comes with a catalogue that illuminates a few of the Master of Utopia Parkway's proclivities. A former assistant describes the artist as "grey and thin as a whippet," subsisting on a "diet of white cake with vanilla frosting, brownies and cherry cokes or cups of tea"—a portrayal that jibes perfectly with Cornell's ethereal, whimsical constructions. Through May 26. (Zoubok, 533 W. 23rd St. 212-675-7490.)

GERARD PETRUS FIERET
The eccentric Dutch photographer, now in his early eighties, is represented here by black-and-white prints from the nineteen-sixties and early seventies that look like they were rescued from the trash. With a few exceptions, the pictures are of women, some nude in Fieret's studio, some dressed and on the street; some appear to be prostitutes, others are schoolgirls or bohemians. The work is sexy, obsessive, and a bit crude, but it's full of quirky charm. And Fieret's seemingly careless presentation has an oddball appeal: not only does he scrawl his signa-

ture across the photographs, he rubber-stamps them repeatedly with his name and address. Outsider compulsiveness meets the sexual revolution head on, and the resulting wreck is riveting. Through May 26. (Bell, 511 W. 25th St. 212-691-3883.)

JIM LAMBIE

Lambie is known for striped installations that take over entire gallery floors, and for his chipped, beaten, and broken approach to sculpture. Here he offers an initial surprise: works that hang just like old-fashioned paintings on the walls. Persian carpets peppered with amoebic forms made from mirror shards, T-shirts, and other materials are turned into mash-ups of Matisse and Miró, with a bit of thrift shop thrown in. The works are firmly within the Lambie aesthetic, even if the Orientalist decorative backgrounds are not. A video with a dim flickering light and a few cymbals hanging from the ceiling aren't quite enough to turn the show, christened "The Prismatics," into a credible *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Through May 26. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663.)

"PEOPLE PICTURES"

Forty-four vintage photographs record what could be Busby Berkeley routines on a grand scale—masses of soldiers, sailors, students, or scouts standing together on a parade ground or a football field in the shape of an emblem that's recognizable only from the camera's elevated perspective. Twenty-five thousand officers and men at Camp Dix, New Jersey, form an enormous Liberty Bell, crack and all; other groups arrange themselves into the American flag, the Statue of Liberty, Uncle Sam, and Woodrow Wilson. These patriotic symbols, along with slogans like "GOD AND THE RIGHT," were especially popular during the First and Second World Wars, when the bulk of this work was made. Today, the photographs are vernacular oddities and pop icons with a distinctly totalitarian bent. Through May 19. (Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 212-627-4819.)

Short List

GLENN BROWN: Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through June 9. **TIM HAWKINSON:** PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258. Through June 9. **RACHEL HOWARD:** Bohen Foundation, 415 W. 13th St. 212-334-2281. Through May 25. **ALEXANDER LEE:** Clementine, 623 W. 27th St. 212-243-5937. Through May 26. **DANA SCHUTZ:** Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through May 19. **FRANK STELLA:** Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474. Through July 6.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

LIZ DESCHENES

Deschenes shows six abstract photographs from a series she calls "Moiré" that are nearly impossible to look at. Each unique print, about the size of a movie poster, is a dense pattern of dots created by the deliberately misaligned overlay of two negatives. Although printed in color, the work appears black-and-white, and after a minute it begins to flicker and vibrate. The patterns create areas of foglike density that resist close scrutiny; instead of fixing on a piece, the eye is sent racing along parallel tracks that converge, combust, and go blurry. Deschenes disorients, fascinates, and makes us swoon. Through May 20. (Abreu, 36 Orchard St. 212-995-1774.)

MARTHA ROSLER

Never one to tread lightly around political issues, Rosler calls her installation "a burlesque of a minefield." It's agitprop, and, as such, it invites dismissal. But beware—those who try to shrug it off will find themselves trapped in a psychological sting. A manic trumpet solo of "God Bless America" loops (played by a virtual soldier with a prosthetic leg) while the "Phrasealator," a seductive translation gizmo, tricks innocent visitors into reciting lines like "Where's Osama?" and "Go go go go GO!," then repeats them in Arabic. Nearby, strips of paper listing war statistics are taped to the wall. As we note the escalation of daily attacks by the insurgency in Iraq, a motion sensor triggers the deafening sound of an explosion. Through May 25. (Location One, 26 Greene St. 212-334-3347.)

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OPENS THIS WEEK!
La Bayadère

Anne Milewski and Misty Copeland in *La Bayadère*. Photo by Marty Sohl.

Amid the sweeping vistas and grand temples of mystical India, Marius Petipa's great Russian classic, staged by Natalia Makarova, is a glorious epic of eternal love and godly revenge.

May 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 21 at 8pm; May 16 and 19 at 2pm

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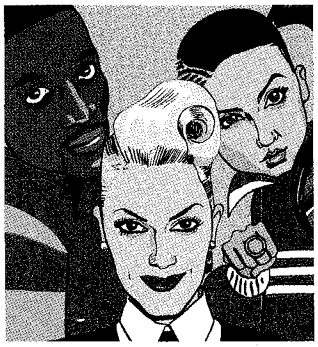
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
SPRING FLING



Spring is a-comin' in, and it goes like this: "Woo-hoo! Yee-hoo!" Gwen Stefani, having found that Americans were not ready for "yodel-ay-yodel-ay-yodel-ay-he-hoo," the chorus of her earlier single "Wind It Up," has gone a more moderate route for "The Sweet Escape," a feathery meringue and a bona-fide hit. The chorus begins with an ostensible apology—"I've been a real bad girl"—before giving way to wordless hoots and a plea to "get away," perhaps from yodelling. Stefani's escape is abetted by the Senegalese singer Akon, who made his name as a guest singer on many hip-hop songs. Now Akon is appearing on pop songs, apparently all of them. The two perform together at the PNC Bank Arts Center on May 18 and at Jones Beach on May 20. Also on the bill is the tiny British rapper Lady Sovereign, who hasn't registered with American hip-hop fans, despite the fact that her track "Love Me or Hate Me" has gone over well with children and clubgoers. She may not have found the audience that she was looking for, but at least an audience has found her. Yee-hoo.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

Short List

TINA BARNEY: Borden, 560 Broadway. 212-431-0166. Through June 16. **TIM HAWKINSON:** Nyehaus, 15 Gramercy Park S. 212-995-1785. Through June 16.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
The season gets into full swing this week with three rotating programs and a family matinée on May 19, which juxtaposes Balanchine's "Square Dance"—a winning fusion of courtly European and American social dance—and his brilliant "Symphony in C" with Christopher Wheeldon's précis of themes from the musical "Carousel." "Apollo," "Orpheus," and "Agon," all made by Balanchine to music by Stravinsky, will be shown in chronological order in the program "A Greek Trilogy," a rare opportunity to see them performed together. Also not to be missed is the "Four Voices" program, which includes Alexei Ratmansky's enigmatic pas de deux "Middle Duet" and Jerome Robbins's "Moves." ♦ May 15-16 at 7:30 and May 19 at 8: "Carousel (A Dance)," "Middle Duet," "Moves," and "La Sonnambula." ♦ May 17 at 8 and May 22 at 7:30: "Mozartiana," "Piano Pieces," and "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2." ♦ May 18 at 8 and May 20 at 3: "Apollo," "Orpheus," and "Agon." ♦ May 19 at 2: "Square Dance," "Carousel (A Dance)," and "Symphony in C." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through June 24.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
The ballet "La Bayadère," loosely based on a fifth-century Indian epic, is the tragic story of a temple dancer and her thwarted love, performed here in Natalia Makarova's 1980 version. The soul of the ballet lies in the famous "Kingdom of the Shades" scene, which portrays a mythical place where the souls of the lovers can be united. The role of the bayadère will be performed on different nights by Paloma Herrera, the expansive Veronika Part, the Kirov ballerina Diana Vishneva, Irina Dvorovenko, and, on the final night, the Georgian star Nina Ananiashvili. Ethan Stiefel, back from knee surgery, will also perform (on May 16 and May 19). ♦ May 15, May 17-18, and May 21 at 8 and May 16 and May 19 at 2 and 8: "La Bayadère." ♦ May 22 at 8: "Othello." (Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-362-6000. Through July 7.)

DOUG VARONE AND DANCERS
Varone is a master of both hurricane-strength storms of group motion and minute gestures rich in subtext. For his new "Dense Terrain," the language he's invented is both spoken and scattered across the stage in printed form. From this and from the score, provided by the film composer Nathan Larson, the choreography builds patterns of interconnectedness. Varone's company of distinctive dancers benefits from the return of its expressive Everyman, Larry Hahn. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. May 16 and May 18-19 at 7:30 and May 20 at 3.)

COMPANHIA PORTUGUESA DE BAILADO CONTEMPORÂNEO
Vasco Wellenkamp's extraordinary company of impassioned dancers returns to the Joyce. His new "Sete Sonhos de Pássaros" ("Seven Bird Dreams") takes its narrative from the Persian poem "The Conference of the Birds," a Sufi allegory of enlightenment. "Requiem" tackles Britten's famous antiwar score. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 16 at 7:30, May 17-18 at 8, May 19 at 2 and 8, and May 20 at 2 and 7:30.)

LAWRENCE GOLDHUBER / BIGMANARTS
This diverting evening of repertory features the première of "Hoody," an urban take on Little Red Riding Hood. The cast—which includes Arthur Aviles as a convincingly manic child, Keely Garfield as his put-upon mother, and Robert La-Fosse as a cruising wolf figure—is the greatest strength of both the work and the prop-heavy program. "Dances with Wolves" has Goldhuber and Garfield foxtrotting through a dysfunctional love affair; "A Match Made in Heaven" pairs Goldhuber as Adam with Wallie Wolfgruber as Eve; and in "Gluttony" a picnic lunch takes its revenge on Goldhuber in a fat suit. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. May 16-19 at 7:30.)

"DANCEOFF!"
The irrepressible Katie Workum and Terry Dan Bartlett return to P.S. 122 with their downtown dance revue, in which choreographers of all stripes show short new works in a raucous, laid-back setting. This week features dances by six artists, including the Canadian Dana Michel, Luke Miller (from Susan Marshall's company), and Heather McArdle. (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. May 16-17 at 8.)

LIZ SARGENT INSTALLATIONS
For "Revealing," her first evening-length production at Danspace, Sargent traps her performers in box frames the size of small elevator cars, with transparent plastic or reflective Mylar sides. Inside them, the dancers' slow turning and self-regard is magnified, taking on an emotional charge as they gaze out, as if expecting rescue. As they scratch at the walls, splatter and streak them with paint, and eventually tear them down, everything, including their bodies, becomes a gorgeous resurrection of Abstract Expressionism—but one fears for St. Mark's Church. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. May 17-20 at 8:30.)

"E-MOVES"
Harlem Stage's annual dance showcase concludes its run. (The Gatehouse, 150 W. Convent Ave., at 135th St. 212-650-7100. May 18-19 at 7:30 and May 20 at 3.)

CHRISTOPHER CAINES DANCE COMPANY
Caines is a music-comes-first kind of choreographer. "Farewell to Music" plays contrapuntally with vocal compositions that Mozart created for private performances. "Skittle Alley (Ninepins)" finds a friendly competition in a piano trio that Mozart supposedly composed during a bowling party. As always, excellent musicians perform live. (Clark Studio Theatre, 70 Lincoln Center Plaza. 212-868-4444. May 19 at 2 and 7:30, May 20 at 2, and May 21-23 at 7:30.)

"THE A.W.A.R.D. SHOW!"
The finalists from each event in the monthly showcase of new work, including Kate Weare, Jennie Mary-Tai Liu, and Kiyoko Kashiwagi, restage their works. The winner will be awarded a ten-thousand-dollar grant. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-334-7479. May 20 at 7.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

OPÉRA FRANÇAIS DE NEW YORK
With the Met's "Orfeo ed Euridice" having just closed, Jean-Philippe Clarac and Olivier Deloeuil, the masterminds behind this chic little Gotham outfit, offer a production of Rameau's **"Castor et Pollux,"** another noble work that features a trip to Hades and a timely deus ex machina. Clarac and Deloeuil's staging moves from Athens, Greece, to Astoria, Queens; Yves Abel, an elegant conductor of Francophone fare, leads the composer's original 1754 version for chamber orchestra. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-307-4100. May 17 and May 19 at 8.)

BRONX OPERA: "CARMEN"
Opera traditionalists starved for content can head out to the John Cranford Adams Playhouse, at Hofstra University, to hear the admirable company's production of Bizet's Spanish scorcher, in which Michael Spierman leads a cast of promising young professionals (with orchestra) in an English-language version. (Hempstead, N.Y. 516-463-6644. May 18 at 8 and May 19 at 2.)

"WORKS & PROCESS" SERIES: LOUIS KARCHIN'S "ROMULUS"
Karchin's perch as a professor of composition at New York University has a metaphorical significance, since his music has a more appealingly lyrical outline than that of his "uptown" modernist colleagues. So his new, hour-long treatment of Alexandre Dumas *père's* comic play (a co-production with American Opera Projects) about two bachelor scientists who suddenly discover a newborn baby in their midst holds promise; so does the cast, which includes such singers as Katrina Thurman, Thomas Meglioranza, and Wilbur Pauley. Peter Flynn directs; Karchin conducts the

PATRICK LONG

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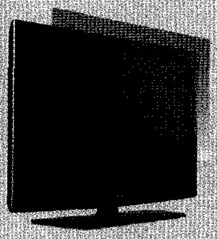

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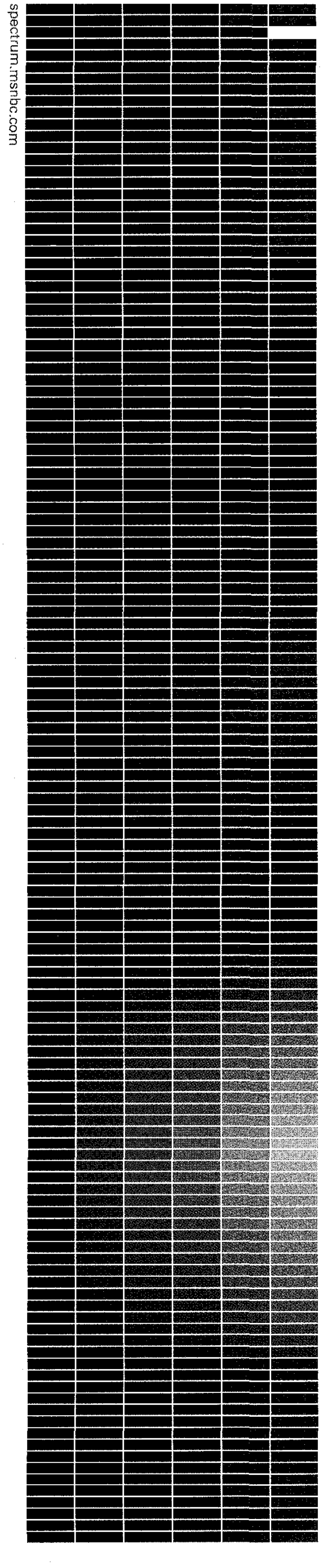

Washington Square Ensemble. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. May 20-21 at 8.)

SYMPHONY SPACE: "WALL TO WALL OPERA"
The Upper West Side concert center's annual gift to the city will run for thirteen hours this year, with performances by the orchestra and soloists of New York City Opera and by some of the smaller groups (such as Encompass New Opera Theatre and the Center for Contemporary Opera) featured in City Opera's recent "Vox" festival of new works. A bel-canto master class taught by the soprano Renata Scotto will be a highlight of the day. (Broadway at 95th St. May 19 at 11 A.M. No tickets required. For more information, see www.symphonyspace.org.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY
Last week, Esa-Pekka Salonen's Los Angeles Philharmonic dazzled New York with its sleek and muscular sound; now it's the turn of the ensemble from the other California, with its light-filled tone and its openhearted music director, Michael Tilson Thomas. His two programs comprise longtime favorites. May 17 at 8: Stravinsky's delectable Divertimento from "The Fairy's Kiss" and implacable "Symphony in Three Movements," along with Tchaikovsky's heartfelt Symphony No. 1, "Winter Dreams." ♦ May 18 at 8: Copland's trenchant (and very difficult) "Short Symphony," a selection of songs from Mahler's "Des Knaben Wunderhorn" (with the estimable Thomas Hampson), and Strauss's "Also Sprach Zarathustra." (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)

THE MET ORCHESTRA
The Metropolitan Opera's season is done, but its great orchestra soldiers on. In the second of two final concerts, James Levine trades in Elliott Carter for a fusillade of songs and operatic arias by Massenet, Thomas (the Mad Scene from "Hamlet"), Mozart, and Strauss, all with the delightful coloratura soprano Natalie Dessay. This being a Levine program, the cup will overflow with additional music by Strauss (the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme" Suite) and Ravel (the Suite No. 2 from "Daphnis et Chloé"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 20 at 3.)

ORCHESTRA OF THE S.E.M. ENSEMBLE
Music by Somei Satoh and Karlheinz Stockhausen will be featured on a program of twentieth-century classics by Wolpe, Xenakis ("Palimpsest"), Earle Brown ("Available Forms I"), and, surprisingly, Strauss ("Metamorphosen"), performed by Petr Kotik's longtime ensemble, a vanguard of modern and experimentalist music. Guests include the veteran New York baritone Thomas Buckner and the Ostravská Banda, from the Czech Republic. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. May 21 at 8.)

RECITALS

"CHAMBER MUSIC AT THE Y"
In a festival of intergenerational string talent, two established younger stars from Britain—the violinist Daniel Hope and the cellist Paul Watkins—join two distinguished veterans, the violinist Jaime Laredo and the cellist Sharon Robinson, and a pair of new protégés for a program of music by Schubert (the charming String Trio in B-Flat Major and the towering String Quintet), Schulhoff (the String Sextet), and Gideon Klein. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. May 15-16 at 8.)

AUSTRIAN CULTURAL FORUM: "DISCOVERIES"
Elisabeth von Magnus, a Viennese mezzo-soprano, takes the stage at the Forum's diminutive, blond-wood concert hall for the first two recitals in a series devoted to German and Austrian songs, a little off the beaten path. May 15-16 at 8: Songs by Haydn (including the cantata "Arianna a Naxos") and Mozart bookend a group by the obscure Johann Hoven. ♦ May 19 and May 21 at 8: Music by Berg, Zemlinsky, Eisler, and Alma Mahler. (11 E. 52nd St. To reserve free tickets, which are required, call 212-319-5300.)

NINE CIRCLES CHAMBER THEATRE
This unconventional ensemble, headed by the violinist Gil Morgenstern and the writer-director Jonathan Levi, will kick off the Rubin Museum of Art's new interdisciplinary performing-arts series with "Reflections: Beauty Born of Terror," a production offered in tribute to the ideals of the Dalai Lama, which explores, through literature and music, the endurance of hope and spirituality amid the dystopian horrors of the twentieth century. The actor Jay O. Sanders, the cellist Edward Arron, and the pianist Jeewon Park join Morgenstern in music by Messiaen, Prokofiev, Chen Yi, and Zhou Long. (150 W. 17th St. 212-620-5000. May 16 at 7.)

BARGEMUSIC
May 16 and May 18 at 8: The floating chamber-music series begins an expansive week with a piano recital by Olga Vinokur, who performs sonatas by Haydn and Barber along with virtuoso paraphrases by Liszt and Rachmaninoff. ♦ May 19 at noon: Vinokur and the violinist Mark Peskanov offer an all-Schubert program. ♦ May 19 at 8: The Knights Chamber Orchestra, a stylish and increasingly prominent young Brooklyn band, performs concertos by Vivaldi and Haydn as well as Elgar's endearing Serenade for Strings. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

"THE MOVADO HOUR"
The Baryshnikov Arts Center's occasional series offers concertgoers a rare treat: chamber music in a relaxed and sophisticated salon setting. Gracing the space next is the versatile pianist Pedja Muzijevic (the series' curator), who joins the Zephyros Winds to perform the quintets for piano and winds by Mozart and Beethoven; the group will go it alone in Ligeti's "Bagatelles." (37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. May 17 at 7. To reserve free tickets, which are required, call 917-934-4966.)

ITZHAK PERLMAN
Rohan de Silva accompanies the legendary violinist, who brings his commanding sound to a mostly lighter program of music by Strauss (the Violin Sonata), Schubert, Lukas Foss ("Three American Pieces"), and other works to be announced from the stage. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. May 17 at 8.)

URSULA OPPENS
Arium, an inviting downtown café, bar, and serious concert space, hosts the perceptive and deeply respected pianist, who offers a recital alternating works by Beethoven, Schubert, and Ravel ("Valses Nobles et Sentimentales") with four pieces by her distinguished friend Tobias Picker (including "Old and Lost Rivers"). (31 Little W. 12th St. 212-463-8630. May 20 at 5.)

"FREE FOR ALL AT TOWN HALL": NADJA SALERNO-SONNENBERG AND ANNE-MARIE MCDERMOTT
The popular series, which boasts a level of talent far out of proportion to its entrance fee, presents a concert by the impassioned and admired violinist and pianist, who will perform Brahms's three Sonatas for Violin and Piano. (123 W. 43rd St. May 20 at 5. Free tickets, which are limited to two per customer, will be available beginning at noon on the day of the concert.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
With Alice Tully Hall closed for extensive renovations, New York's chamber-music masters offer their final concerts of the year in Jazz at Lincoln Center's Rose Hall. The formidable pianist Yefim Bronfman will perform the world première of a solo work by Bright Sheng on a program that also features Dvořák's Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major and Dohnányi's Serenade for String Trio (with the violinist Cho-Liang Lin, the violist Paul Neubauer, and the cellist David Finckel). (Broadway at 60th St. 212-875-5788. May 20 at 5 and May 22 at 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

BROOKLYN RULES
A drama about young men who are tempted by the Mob. Starring Scott Caan and Alec Baldwin. Directed by Michael Corrente. Opening May 18. (34th Street Theatre and Union Square.)

CAPTIVITY
A horror film, directed by Roland Joffé, about a couple chained together in a basement. Opening May 18. (In wide release.)

EVEN MONEY
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening May 18. (Empire 25 and 19th Street East 6.)

FAY GRIM
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening May 18. (In wide release.)

FLANDERS
Bruno Dumont directed this drama, about a man who is drafted to fight in a desert war. In French. Opening May 18. (Cinema Village.)

THE LAST TIME
A drama about salesmen in love, starring Michael Keaton, Brendan Fraser, and Amber Valletta; written and directed by Michael Caleo. Opening May 18. (Quad Cinema.)

ONCE
In this musical, set in Dublin, a busker and an immigrant form a duo. Directed by John Carney. Opening May 16. (Sunshine Cinema.)

SEVERANCE
In this horror comedy, directed by Christopher Smith, a company's outdoor adventure trip results in gruesome accidents. Opening May 18. (Angelika Film Center.)

SHREK THE THIRD
Directed by Chris Miller; with the voices of Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, Cameron Diaz, and Julie Andrews. Opening May 18. (In wide release.)

THE WENDELL BAKER STORY
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening May 18. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

AWAY FROM HER
Julie Christie is sixty-six, but her face hasn't lost its beautiful definition—the downward-turning mouth, the slightly pointed chin, the eyes that can explode with wrath. Her temperament hasn't fallen out of shape, either. As Fiona, an Ontario woman succumbing to Alzheimer's, she seems quite lost one second but then, as an intention pierces through a cloud of unhappiness, becomes crisp and incisive. Christie, turning a medical condition into a dramatic coup, makes it impossible for us merely to feel sorry for Fiona, and that toughness gives the film the abrupt, challenging intelligence of a fresh and exploratory work rather than the soft piteousness of, say, a "Movie of the Week" from 1973. With Gordon Pinsent, the veteran Canadian actor, who has a capacious gut, a fine beard, and the burnished aspect of an aging lion, as Grant, Fiona's longtime husband; Michael Murphy as the stricken man whom Fiona falls in love with at an assisted-living facility; and Olympia Dukakis as the practical old broad who gives Grant a way to remain loyal yet survive as a man. The young Canadian actress Sarah Polley adapted the Alice Munro story "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" and also directed the movie, with attention to the human mysteries and a feeling for the spiritual meaning of landscape. In all, a minor triumph.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 5/14/07.) (In wide release.)

DAY NIGHT DAY NIGHT
Julia Loktev wrote and directed this ambitious drama, which follows a nameless terrorist recruit (Luisa Williams) as she prepares to carry out a suicide bombing in Times Square. Loktev pays close attention to personal detail, using a claustrophobic camera style and slow, real-time pacing. The plotter is portrayed as a lost soul hoping for the approval and succor of a God she's not quite sure exists. With no ethnicity or affiliation specified for the woman (she's clearly American, with dark features), the story lacks context, leaving one with a sense that the filmmaker has little more to say than that terrorists are people, too. But not mentioning the political motives of those who want to give their lives to take the lives of others makes an incomplete picture, to potentially detrimental effect.—*Shauna Lyon* (IFC Center.)

DISTURBIA
Judged as an adolescent, suburban version of Hitchcock's extraordinarily sophisticated 1954 urban thriller "Rear Window," this movie, written by Christopher B. Landon and Carl Ellsworth and directed by D. J. Caruso, can rightly be called a travesty. The dopiness of it, however, may be an indication not

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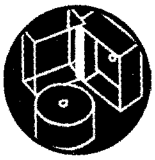


DVD NOTES
TRIPLE PLAY

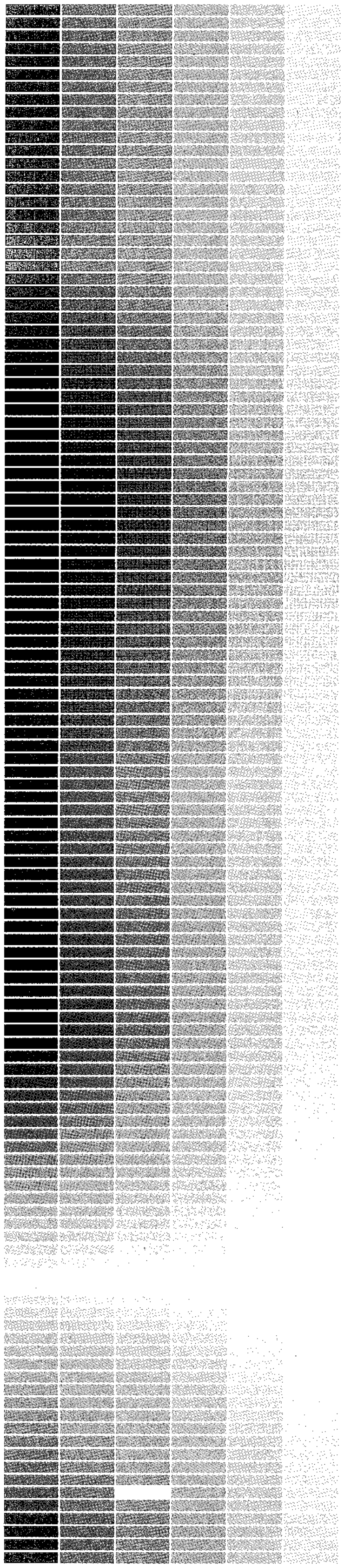
The Criterion Collection's release of the masterpieces **"Army of Shadows," "Sansho the Bailiff,"** and **"The Third Man,"** by France's Jean-Pierre Melville, Japan's Kenji Mizoguchi, and Britain's Carol Reed, respectively, renews both the lustre and the relevance of classical narrative moviemaking from the middle of the twentieth century.

"Army of Shadows," from 1969, examines the travails of the French Resistance as its leaders test their own capacity for cruelty against the Nazi Occupation. Indeed, the movie's greatness lies in the fact that Melville's French rebels not only try to preserve a remnant of civic virtue but confront the meaning of actions as complex and charged as summary executions. Melville, like Joseph Kessel, on whose novel the film was based, had fought with the Free French; the film resonates with his intense personal investment, and he elicits appropriately fierce and committed performances from his actors, especially Lino Ventura and Simone Signoret.

"Sansho the Bailiff," a 1954 film that depicts slavery as a moral canker in eleventh-century Japan, is both a lament for a feudal past and a call for modern democratization. The plot concerns outlaws who kidnap a deposed governor's son, daughter, and wife, sell the children to a slave camp, and force their mother into prostitution. Mizoguchi's packed yet fluid style reveals his desire to follow his performers closely as they reflect the characters' humanity in the face of calamity and defeat; the scene of the mother being thrown into a boat while the children are seized onshore has a harrowing beauty.

"The Third Man," from 1949, with a script by Graham Greene, uses the partition of postwar Vienna as the backdrop for a darkly comic yet romantic thriller about the unsentimental education of an American innocent abroad, a pulp-fiction writer (Joseph Cotten) who learns that his pal Harry Lime (Orson Welles) has become a black-market dealer in diluted penicillin. Reed's odd angles and glistening night scenes brought out the shadowy nuances of Greene's haunted figures. As the fascinating extras reveal, Reed ingeniously worked with and around Welles—who showed up late in the shoot and hated the Viennese sewer-system location—to bring Lime to coruscating life. It was Welles's most popular role, and the actor took credit for creating it.

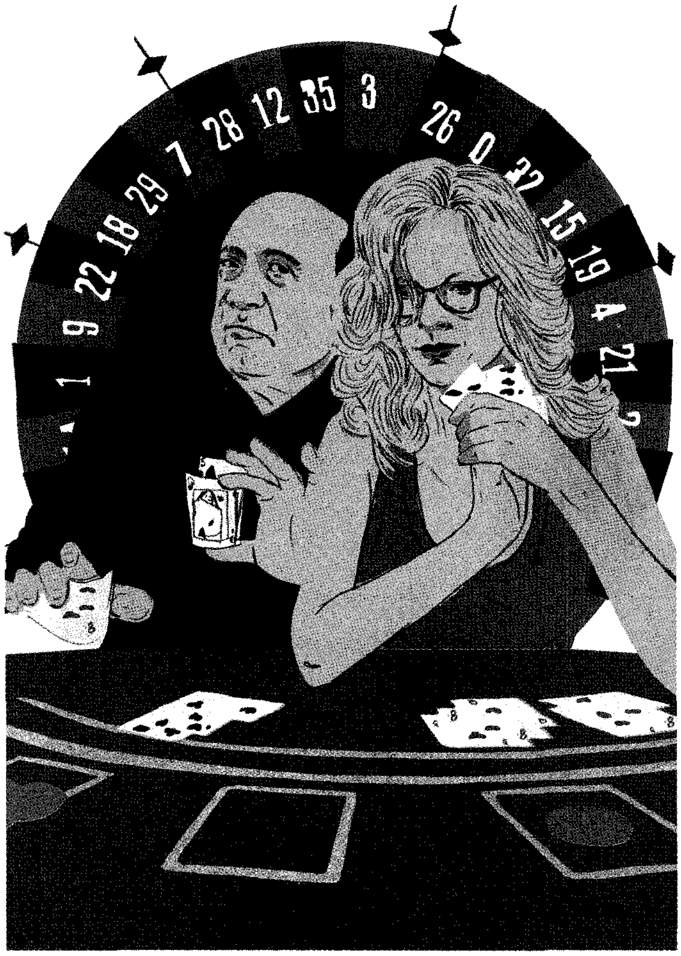
—*Michael Sragow*


Hogzilla heads to the silver screen
Pork T-bone with walnut bulgur pilaf recipe
A Fuller Spectrum of News
msnbc.com

so much of cinematic ineptitude as of the changes in a movie culture that was once devoted to adults and is now rather haplessly and redundantly devoted to kids. Shia LaBeouf, Sarah Roemer, and Aaron Yoo, aided by enough electronic equipment to open a Circuit City, spy on a suspected murderer (David Morse) living across the street. When he gets wise to them, the picture turns into a conventional (and at times effectively scary) horror movie, with splattered blood and corpses floating in some sort of basement vat.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

EVEN MONEY

The director Mark Rydell ("The Rose," "On Golden Pond") suffuses this hard-nosed anti-gambling drama with the grim knowledge that, in the end, the house always wins. The script, by Robert Tannen, links the fortunes of ten characters in a round of doomed compulsion: an English professor (Ray Liotta) whose novelist wife (Kim Basinger) abandons work and home for the casino; the washed-up magician (Danny DeVito) she meets there; an indebted sports bettor (Forest Whitaker) who wants his younger brother, a college basketball star (Nick Cannon), to shave points; two small-time bookies, one of whom (Jay Mohr) loves the action and the other of whom (Grant Sullivan) loves a nurse (Carla Gugino) who wants him to quit; a suave, sadistic mobster (Tim Roth); and the war-wounded detective (Kelsey Grammer) who collects the bodies as they fall. Rydell's blunt moralism and almost campy sincerity seem a throwback to distant decades. He elicits amazingly vivid and concise performances (especially from DeVito and Whitaker), and, without rummaging through backstories, simply shows the lure of the payoff to be irresistible to certain unfortunate souls. Despite huge gaps in the plot and some implausible staging of scenes, the old-school storytelling exudes a primal force.—*Richard Brody* (Empire 25 and 19th Street East 6.)



Mark Rydell's gambling drama "Even Money" opens May 18.

RACHEL DOMM

HOT FUZZ

A worthy successor to "Shaun of the Dead," though not a sequel. That dealt with zombies in London; this, even more forbiddingly, deals with the British rural classes, hellbent on preserving their way of life. Simon Pegg (who co-wrote the script) stars as Nicholas Angel, an ambitious policeman consigned, for his own good, to a blameless country town, where he pairs up with an overweight local officer, Danny Butterman (Nick Frost), to chase shoplifters and swans. Needless to say, there are darker crimes to come, and the partners are finally drawn into deafening shoot-outs and high-speed chases—all the paraphernalia of the American cop movies to which Danny is so devoted. Edgar Wright's movie, generous with its gags, doesn't so much spoof the action-thriller genre as pay it prolonged homage, in the most inappropriate of settings; along the way, it finds time to anatomize, as did "Shaun of the Dead," the peculiar lusts and lunacies of modern England—or, at least, that part of it which tries to wish modernity away.—*Anthony Lane* (4/30/07) (In wide release.)

I DON'T WANT TO SLEEP ALONE

The first shot of Tsai Ming-Liang's oblique drama—a paralyzed man in bed, fed through a tube and serenaded by a recorded aria from "The Magic Flute"—sets out the blend of degradation and exaltation that marks the entire story. A homeless man in Kuala Lumpur collapses at the side of the road and is taken in by a Bangladeshi migrant laborer. As the vagrant recovers and explores the neighborhood, he meets the paralyzed man's sister; they become a couple of sorts, spending too much time looking for a trysting place among the hulking ruins of abandoned skyscrapers. But the man who took him in is attracted to him, too, as is the invalid's mother (who, in scenes of colossal squirm value, can't keep her hands off her son). This record of grinding frustration and fleeting tenderness, composed mainly of static long takes, plays out in a deadened, polyglot, pan-urban landscape of globalization's unfulfilled promise; instead of a world brought together, Tsai shows natives turned into aliens at home, who remain silent in every language. His political point regarding Malaysia is sharp and angry: when government, religion, and tradition put desire under an iron fist despite the free market in labor, humans are reduced to beasts of burden, and their desire turns beastly as well. In Taiwanese, Malay, Mandarin, and Bengali.—*R.B.* (IFC Center.)

LUCKY YOU

This gambling movie is tight and focussed at the Vegas tables where men (and the occasional woman) play the incomparable high-stakes game of Texas hold'em but is conventional, weak, and dumb everywhere else. Eric Bana is a poker brat who's too emotional and undisciplined to be a winner; Robert Duvall (slit-eyed, and in good form) is his champion father; and Drew Barrymore is the moral girl from Bakersfield who falls in love not with the gambler in Bana but with the responsible man she would like him to be—a terrible basis for a love affair and a stuffy idea for a movie romance. Many real-life champion players sit around with the actors, muttering insults and a few grudging compliments. Written by Eric Roth and Curtis Hanson; directed by Hanson.—*D.D.* (5/14/07) (In wide release.)

LES MAÎTRES FOUS

To the French filmmaker Jean Rouch, all the world's a stage. In this 1955 documentary, he reports on the annual festivities of the West African Hauka cult. The group withdraws from the city of Accra, Ghana, to a rural compound, which they call the "government palace," and play-act as the "mad masters" of the title. Working themselves up into drooling fits, burning themselves, sacrificing a dog and drinking its spurting blood, they mime the pomp of their colonial overlords, calling one another "captain," "governor," "secretary general," and so on, and holding an officious conference to debate whether to eat the dog raw or cooked. The next day, back in Accra, the revellers trade one role for another, returning to their jobs as merchants, soldiers, laborers, and thieves. In subsequent films, Rouch pushed the idea of self-dramatization to more radical ends by working onscreen with his subjects to develop their personae, but here he embeds his illuminating psychosocial speculations in a straightforward documentary essay. In French.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; May 21.)

SEVEN MEN FROM NOW

Budd Boetticher's stark 1956 Western offers a Hemingwayesque intensity of unspoken emotion and bitter wisdom and a visually terse style to match. Before you blink, two of the seven men are already gunned down by Stride (Randolph Scott), the former sheriff of Silver Springs, Colorado, who trawls the desert for the bandits who killed his wife, a Wells Fargo clerk, in a robbery. But the chest full of gold is still missing, and Masters (Lee Marvin), a criminal whom Stride had put away twice, is after it. Meanwhile, John and Annie Greer (Walter Reed and Gail Russell), two Easterners on their way to California whose wagon gets stuck in mud, are rescued by Stride, who falls for Annie but doesn't act on it. In Boetticher's harshly judgmental view, the lawless and barren landscape proves the humanity of some but dehumanizes others: the crazed robbers pursuing Stride scuttle among rocks like scorpions, while the wounded hero, as embodied by the huge yet delicate Scott, moves with a dancer's proud grace.—*R.B.* (Walter Reade; May 16 and May 19.)

SPIDER-MAN 3

The third and least of the series so far. Tobey Maguire, looking ever more costive and uncomfortable, returns as Peter Parker, who finds himself doubly transformed—first into the crime-busting arachnid whom we know and revere, and, second, into a black-suited alternative who revels in violence and, for some unknown reason, keeps breaking into dance moves. He is paired with a distracted Mary Jane (Kirsten Dunst) and, briefly and more entertainingly, with Gwen Stacy (Bryce Dallas Howard), who looks like a villain waiting to happen. For the moment, we have to make do with a couple of dullards: the New Goblin (James Franco), warmed up from the previous films, and Venom (Topher Grace), a frustrated hack consumed by an extraterrestrial compound. All this is orchestrated by the director, Sam Raimi, with a halting, scattershot approach that verges on panic. The only person to emerge from the wreckage with any credit is Thomas Haden Church, who finds a grainy, melancholic streak in the unstoppable Sandman.—*A.L.* (5/7/07) (In wide release.)

THE TREATMENT

Oren Rudavsky's movie tells of Jake Singer (Chris Eigeman), a flustered and bookish New Yorker; he could be the bulkier, less funny second cousin of Woody Allen's Alvy Singer in "Annie Hall." Jake has trouble with his love life, the specific problem being that he doesn't have one. This is surprisingly solved when he falls for Allegra (Famke Janssen), the widowed mother of a boy in the private school where Jake teaches English; more surprising still, she falls for Jake in return. Their affair feels slight and plaintive, and the film—adapted by Rudavsky and Daniel Saul Housman from Daniel Menaker's novel—would curl up and die were it not for the bracing presence of Ernesto Morales (Ian Holm), Jake's Argentinean psychoanalyst. The movie flirts with the idea that Dr. Morales might be a figment of Jake's fancy, but to no avail; thanks to Holm, it is Morales—at once withering and enlivening—who compels our attention, while the other figures fade away.—*A.L.* (5/7/07) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

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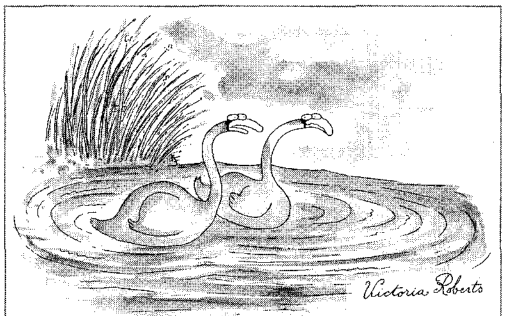
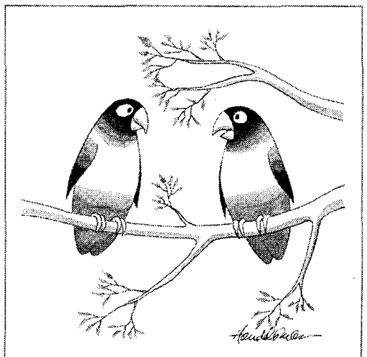
THE LIGHTER SIDE OF LOVE



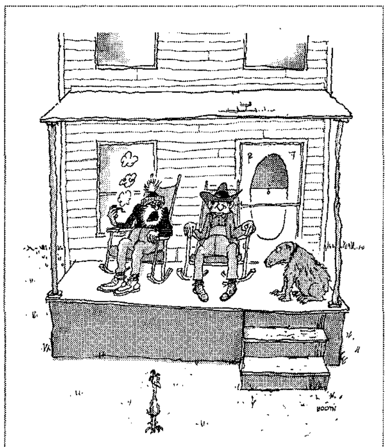
"Maybe we mate for life because we're lazy."

Victoria Roberts, 2005



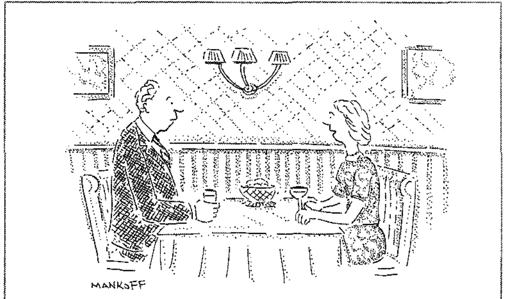
"Of course I love you—I'm programmed to love you. I'm a goddam lovebird."

J. B. Handelsman, 1993



"Were we gay?"

George Booth, 2006



"You're a good husband, Dave—I just want to start marrying other people."

Robert Mankoff, 2006

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
RELATIVE DENSITY

Doug Varone's dances are very fraught emotionally, without ever specifying what the emotion is—an omission that, of course, makes things seem more intense. This is dance's great specialty, to be eloquent and ambiguous at the same time, and Varone has a company that can put it over. Some of his dancers are old (for dancers); they do clumsy things—crawl on the floor, manhandle one another, get their hair messed up. But this is not your wholesome, we're-just-human variety of naturalism. It is often combined with a strange subtext. In quiet moments, the dancers will look one another in the eye and gesture urgently and enigmatically. In "Dense Terrain," which has its New York première on Wednesday at BAM, there will be an extra layer of mystery: Nathan Larson's score includes singer-actors declaiming in a new, "deconstructed" language. At one point, a man lays some crumpled letters on the floor and then eats one of them. Swallowed meaning: that's a good metaphor for Varone's work.

—*Joan Acocella*

THE VALET
Another busy French farce from Francis Veber ("The Dinner Game"). Gad Elmaleh plays François Pignon, a humble parker of cars, who by sheer mischance—Veber's specialty—ends up posing as the temporary lover of a supermodel (Alice Taglioni). Caught up in the whirl of circumstance are a number of other fools and avengers, including a bewildered billionaire (Daniel Auteuil) and his needle-sharp wife (Kristin Scott Thomas). As ever, Veber piles on the obstacles, but the movie feels unresolved, and it lacks the misanthropic verve of his earlier work; it almost seems to be priming itself for a softhearted Hollywood remake. In French.—*A.L.* (4/30/07) (Angelika Film Center and Cinemas 1, 2, and 3.)

WAITRESS
Adrienne Shelly wrote and directed this winning comedy (sadly, her last), starring Keri Russell as Jenna, a small-town waitress and expert pie baker married to a freakishly controlling husband (Jeremy Sisto). When Jenna gets pregnant, she drowns her sorrows by baking desserts with names like Bad Baby Pie and begins a torrid affair with her handsome, bland gynecologist (Nathan Fillion). The able supporting cast includes Andy Griffith (as the curmudgeonly diner owner), Cheryl Hines and Shelly (as Jenna's sparky waitress friends), and Eddie Jemison (as a nerdy suitor), and Russell conveys Jenna's bleak world with a pretty, expressionless face. Shelly deftly achieves a tone pitched between fantasy and reality, its levity belying an astute and humane study of an unhappy relationship steeped in inertia.—*S.L.* (In wide release.)

WHITE NIGHTS
Luchino Visconti, conjuring up Livorno in the Cinecittà studio, wrests visual poetry from that city's winding streets and canals in his uneven yet touching 1957 adaptation of Dostoyevsky's story. The film accumulates strength from the simple force of the central concept: a lonely man (Marcello Mastroianni) meets the woman of his dreams (Maria Schell), only to discover that she's pining for the man of *her* dreams (Jean Marais). Mastroianni is wonderful as a modest fellow who pushes beyond his limits; he externalizes every bit of the character's doting alertness and jealousy, especially in a funny, nerve-racking scene in which he draws his date's attention away from a wiry rock-and-roller by doing his own slapstick jitterbug. The final sequences soar to those operatic heights which Visconti negotiated better than anyone, peaking when snow drapes the tormented heroine in white. Despite lapses in pace, tone, and casting, the movie is a showcase both for Mastroianni and for Visconti's simultaneously baroque and limpid style. In Italian.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade; May 16.)

Also Playing

DELTA FARCE: In wide release. **THE EX:** In wide release. **GEORGIA RULE:** In wide release. **THE HIP HOP PROJECT:** In wide release. **THE SALON:** In wide release. **28 WEEKS LATER . . .:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Essential Cinema." May 17 at 7: "The Passion of Joan of Arc" (1927-28, Carl Theodor Dreyer; silent). ♦ "Goethe-Institut New York Presents." May 17 at 7:30: "The Death of Maria Malibran" (1972, Werner Schroeter; in German). ♦ In première. May 18 and May 21-22 at 7:30 and 9 and May 19-20 at 4:30, 6, 7:30, and 9: "Rolling Like a Stone" (2005, Stefan Berg and Magnus Gertten).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Generation Garrel," films directed by Philippe Garrel or featuring the actors Maurice Garrel and Louis Garrel. All films are in French. May 16 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Liberté, la Nuit" (1983). ♦ May 17 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Emergency Kisses" (1988). ♦ May 18 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Dreamers" (2003, Bernardo Bertolucci). ♦ May 19 at 2:30, 5:45, and 9: "Kings and Queen" (2004, Arnaud Desplechin). ♦ May 20 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Wild Innocence" (2001). ♦ "Jean Genet on Film." May 21 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Maids" (1974, Christopher Miles). ♦ May 22 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Mademoiselle" (1966, Tony Richardson; in French).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through June 7: The nonfiction work of Werner Herzog, plus films of his choice. May 18-19 at 1, 4, 7, and 10: "Little Dieter Needs to Fly" (1997). The 7 P.M. screening on May 19 will be introduced by the director. ♦ May 18-19 at 2:35, 5:35, and 8:35: "Wings of Hope" (1999). ♦ May 20 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20: "The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner" (1973) and "Dark Glow of the Mountains" (1984). The 8:20 screening will be introduced by the director. ♦ May 20 at 2:45, 6:25, and 10:05: "The White Diamond" (2004). ♦ May 21 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Sans Soleil" (1983, Chris Marker) and "Les Maîtres Fous" (†). The 7 P.M. screening will be introduced by Herzog. ♦ May 22 at 1, 4, 7, and 10: "Death for Five Voices" (1995). ♦ May 22 at 2:15, 5:15, and 8:15: "The Transformation of the World Into Music" (1994).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of Fanny Ardant. May 22 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "La Vie Est un Roman" (1983, Alain Resnais; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. May 18-20 at noon: "Jules and Jim" (1962, François Truffaut; in French and German). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." May 18-19: "The Apple" (1980, Menahem Golan).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—The films of Allan King. May 16 at 6: "Skid Row" (1956) and "A Matter of Pride" (1960). ♦ May 16 at 8 and May 21 at 8:30: "Who Has Seen the Wind" (1977). ♦ May 17 at 6: "Termini Station" (1990). ♦ May 17 at 8:30: "One Night Stand" (1978). ♦ May 18 at 6: "A Married Couple" (1969). ♦ May 18 at 8:15 and May 20 at 2: "Maria" (1976) and "Red Emma" (1976). ♦ May 19 at 2: "Dreams" (1961) and "Running Away Backwards" (1964). ♦ May 19 at 4:30: "The Dragon's Egg" (1999). ♦ May 19 at 7: "Memory for Max, Claire, Ida and Company" (2005). ♦ May 21 at 6: "Who's in Charge?" (1983). ♦ "Still Moving." May 18 at 8:30: "Earth" (1930, Alexander Dovzhenko; silent).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—In première. May 17 at 7: "Paprika" (2006, Satoshi Kon), followed by a discussion with the critic Gilberto Perez and the neurophysiologist Robert Stickgold. ♦ The films of Samuel Fuller. May 19 at 2: "Fixed Bayonets" (1951). ♦ May 19 at 4: "Hell and High Water" (1954). ♦ May 19-20 at 6:30: "House of Bamboo" (1955). ♦ May 20 at 4:30: "Park Row" (1952). ♦ Special screening. May 21 at 7:30: "Gray's Anatomy" (1996, Steven Soderbergh).

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. May 16-27 (call for showtimes): "The Changeling" (2007, Jay Stern).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." May 18 at 9:30: "Death in Venice" (1971, Luchino Visconti).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." May 18-19: "Krull" (1983, Peter Yates).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through May 24: The films of Lee Marvin. May 16 at 1 and May 20 at 4:15: "Paint Your Wagon" (1969, Joshua Logan). ♦ May 16 at 4:15 and May 19 at 4: "Seven Men from Now" (†). The May 19 screening will be introduced by Lee Marvin's widow, Pamela Marvin. ♦ May 16 at 6:15: "The Big Heat" (1953, Fritz Lang). ♦ May 17 at 1 and May 18 at 8:30: "Attack" (1956, Robert Aldrich). ♦ May 17 at 3:15: "Point Blank" (1967, John Boorman). ♦ May 18 at 1:15 and May 20 at 2: "The Comancheros" (1961, Michael Curtiz). ♦ May 18 at 3:30: "The Big Red One" (1980, Samuel Fuller). ♦ May 18 at 6:30 and

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May 19 at 2: "The Spikes Gang" (1974, Richard Fleischer). ♦ May 19 at 8:30 and May 22 at 3:10: "Emperor of the North Pole" (1973, Robert Aldrich). The May 19 screening will be introduced by Keith Carradine. ♦ May 20 at 7:30: "Ship of Fools" (1965, Stanley Kramer), introduced by Pamela Marvin. ♦ May 21 at 2:30: "The Killers" (1964, Don Siegel). ♦ May 22 at 1: "Monte Walsh" (1970, William A. Fraker). ♦ Special screenings. May 16 at 8:15: "White Nights" (†). ♦ May 19 at 6 and 11: "Wide Awake" (2006, Alan Berliner), followed by a Q. & A. with the director.

READINGS AND TALKS

POETRY SOCIETY OF AMERICA
Eamon Grennan, Major Jackson, April Bernard, and others read for "The MacDowell Colony Turns 100: Poets Who Have Been in Residence Pay Tribute." The event marks the hundredth birthday of the New Hampshire artists' retreat. (Lang Recital Hall, Hunter College North Building, 69th St. at Lexington Ave. For more information, call 212-254-9628. May 16 at 7.)

"IN THE FLESH"
The May installment of the monthly showcase of erotic literature features Sarah Iverson, Min Jin Lee, Jackie Kessler, Samara O'Shea, Jerry Rodriguez, Dana Vachon, and the curator, Rachel Kramer Bussell. Complimentary candy and cupcakes will be served. (Happy Ending Lounge, 302 Broome St. 212-334-9676. May 16 at 8.)

PETE'S READING SERIES
The long-running Williamsburg series presents Dani Shapiro, reading from her recent novel, "Black & White," with Leslie Simon and Trevor Kelley, both from *Alternative Press*, reading from their co-authored work, "Everybody Hurts: An Essential Guide to Emo Culture." (Pete's Candy Store, 709 Lorimer St. 718-302-3770. May 17 at 7:30.)

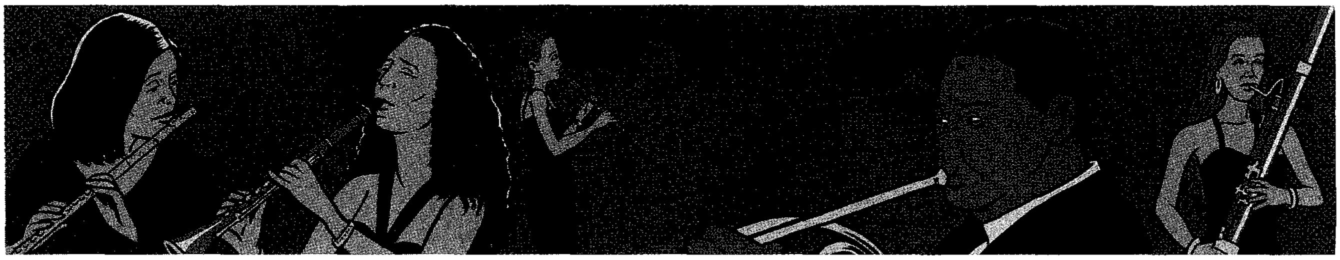
EXPLORERS CLUB
The evolutionary biologist Dr. Luis Espinasa, who has investigated the biodiversity and ecosystems of a vast number of caves, gives a lecture entitled "The Search for Strange Underground Life Forms Around the World." (46 E. 70th St. 212-628-8383. May 22 at 6.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
The former MacArthur and Nieman fellow Alma Guillermoprieto (a contributor to this magazine) delivers the last lecture in a three-part series on contemporary Latin America. Guillermoprieto, who has covered the region for more than two decades, presents "How to Be Mexican: An Instruction Manual in Music and Song," a multimedia examination of the evolution of modern Mexican cultural identity. (South Court Auditorium, Humanities and Social Sciences Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. For more information, call 212-930-9213. May 22 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"WORKING HARBOR DAY"
New York Harbor may not be as glorious and active as it once was, but it is hardly a relic. The city is still one of the nation's largest ports, and on May 19 a pair of narrated boat tours offer a peek at the industry on its shores. The first, at 11 A.M. and again at 3, runs along the Brooklyn waterfront, and the second, at 1, heads toward Staten Island and New Jersey. Both are helmed by folks with firsthand knowledge of maritime commerce. The tours depart from Pier 16, where the South Street Seaport Museum keeps several vessels. (For more information, visit www.workingharbor.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Mark Rothko's luminous canvas "White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose)," which until recently hung outside the office of David Rockefeller, is the star lot of **Sotheby's** evening auction of contemporary art (May 15, followed by a day sale on May 16). The buzz surrounding the sale is deserved: the house reportedly gave Rockefeller a guarantee of more than twice the previous highest price paid for a Rothko painting at auction. Other major works include a luscious red-on-red composition by Francis Bacon, "Study from Innocent X," and three drip paintings by Jackson Pollock. The house's auction of African, Oceanic, and pre-Columbian art (May 17) features works from the collection of Saul and Marsha Stanoff; one of the highlights, a "head crest" from Cameroon once owned by Maurice de Vlaminck, may have been the inspiration for several sculptures by Picasso. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** is expecting its biggest postwar and contemporary evening sale ever (May 16, followed by day sales on May 17), led by two iconic works by Andy Warhol: "Green Car Crash (Green Burning Car I)" and "Lemon Marilyn." There are also two vibrant Rothkos, both untitled, one from 1954 and the other from 1961, as well as works by de Kooning, Guston, and Damien Hirst, among others. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Doyle** joins the fray with a sale of modern and contemporary art (May 22) topped by a 1958 "burst" painting by Adolph Gottlieb ("Blast III"). (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.) ♦ Well-heeled downtowners can head over to **Phillips** for a sale of contemporary art (May 17-18) and pick up "Colored Campbell's Soup Can," by Warhol, or a composition in grays, "Drei Grau Übereinander," by Gerhard Richter. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)



The Imani Winds pay tribute to Josephine Baker.

WAYNO

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
FAR BEYOND TARZAN
May 23-30

In conjunction with the DanceAfrica series (see below), BAM offers a week of notable African films, including Abderrahmane Sissako's "Bamako" and Mehdi Charef's Algerian drama "Daughter of Keltoum." (718-636-4100.)

DANCE
INTO THE LIGHT
May 25-27

Thirty years ago, Chuck Davis saw a Tarzan movie and decided to create a festival demonstrating what the dances of Africa and its diaspora were really like. Now the longest-running performance series at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, DanceAfrica celebrates its anniversary with several companies, including the Ndere Troupe of Uganda. (718-636-4100.)

ART
AMPHIBIAN LOVE
May 26-Sept. 9

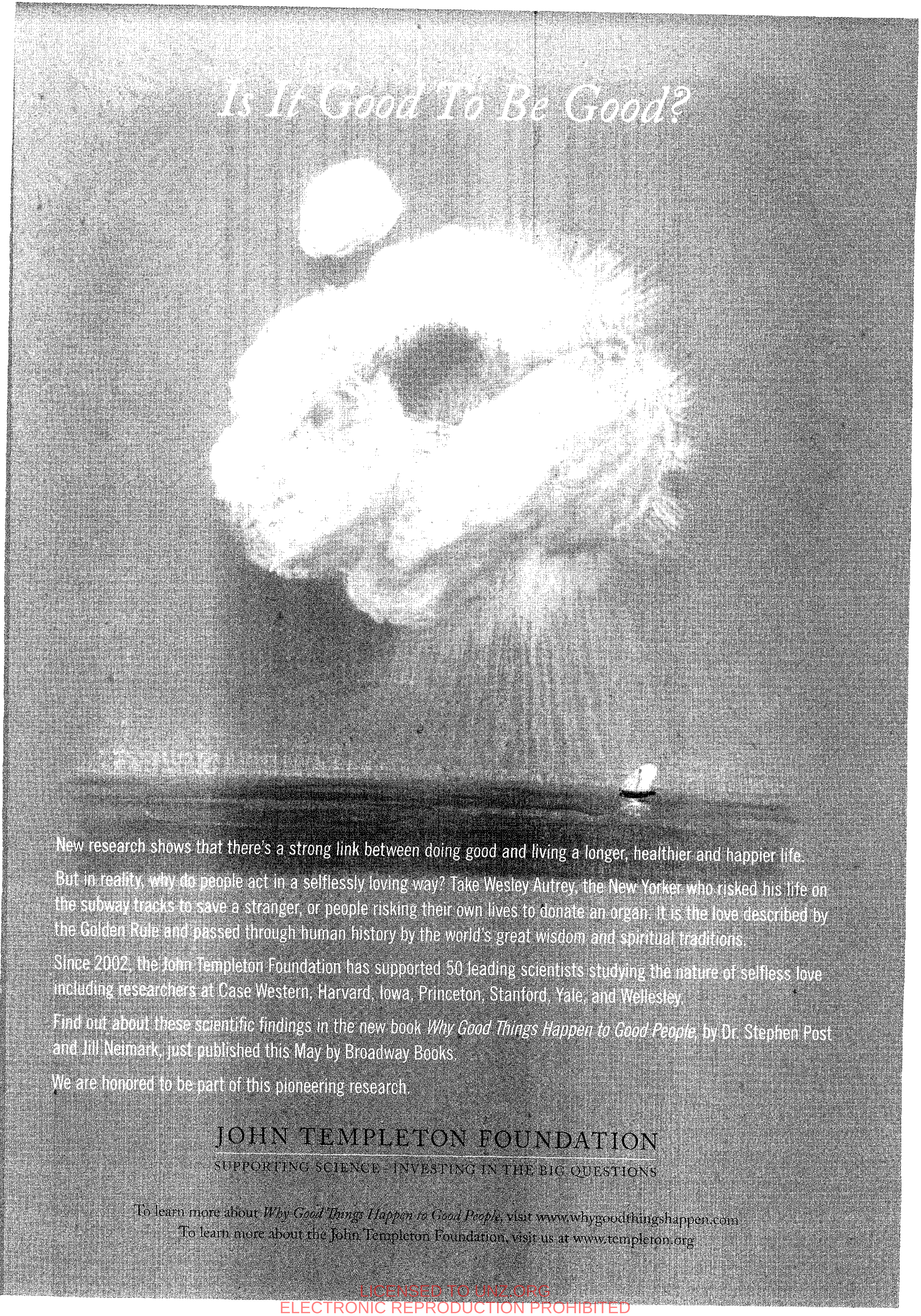
The American Museum of Natural History's popular exhibit "Frogs: A Chorus of Colors" returns for the summer with some two hundred specimens in glass-walled habitats. The centerpiece of the show is a vivarium filled with seventy-five dart-poison frogs. Cameras inside the glass walls can be swivelled, zoomed, and focussed with joysticks to get a closer look at the jewel-bright hoppers. (212-769-5100.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CHEZ JOSEPHINE
June 3

Josephine Baker may have done her greatest work in Paris, but she looms large in the history of the Harlem Renaissance. The Imani Winds, a group of African-American and Latina wind players, pay tribute to her on her hundred-and-first birthday with music, dance, and film at the Apollo Theatre. (212-531-5305.)

NIGHT LIFE
FRESH AIR
June 19

Midsummer Night Swing returns to the plaza at Lincoln Center. The first night features a battle of the big bands that pits George Gee and his Make-Believe Ballroom Orchestra against David Berger & The Sultans of Swing. (www.lincolncenter.org.)



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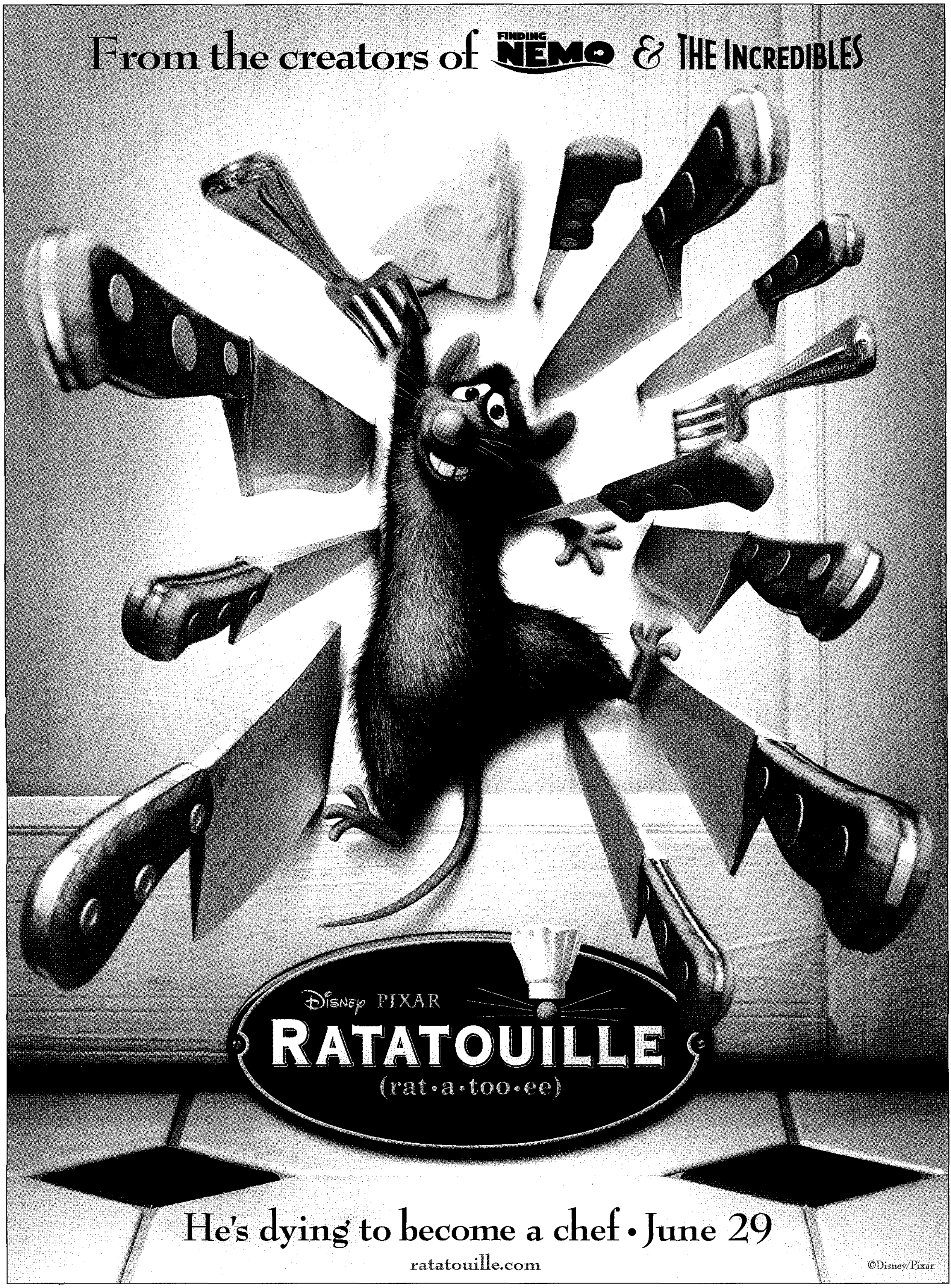
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THE
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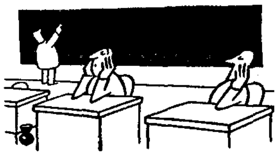
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

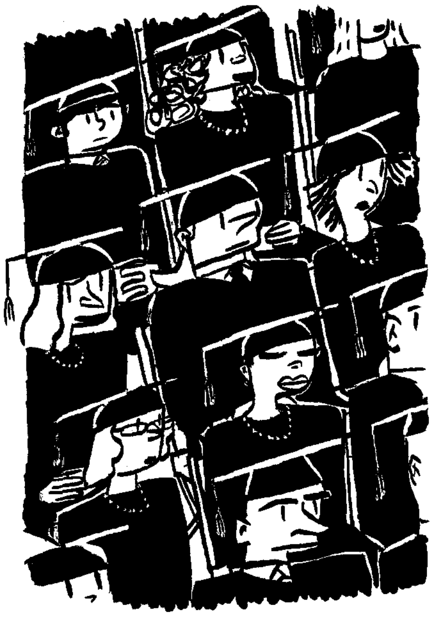
COMMENT
THE GRADUATES



On your first sleepover, your best friend's mother asks if you would like a tuna-fish-salad sandwich. Your own mother gives you tuna-fish-salad sandwiches all the time, so you say, "Sure." When you bite into the sandwich, though, you realize, too late, that your best friend's mother's tuna-fish salad tastes nothing like the tuna-fish salad your mother makes. You never dreamed that it was possible for there to be more than one way to prepare tuna-fish salad. And what's with the bread? It's brown, and appears to have tiny seeds in it. What is more unnerving is the fact that your best friend obviously considers his mother's tuna-fish salad to be perfectly normal and has been eating it with enjoyment all his life. Later on, you discover that the pillows in your best friend's house are filled with some kind of foam-rubber stuff instead of feathers. The toilet paper is pink. What kind of human beings are these? At two o'clock in the morning, you throw up, and your mother comes and takes you home.

College, from which some 1.5 million people will graduate this year, is, basically, a sleepover with grades. In college, it is not so cool to throw up or for your mother to come and take you home. But plenty of students do throw up, and undergo other forms of mental and bodily distress, and plenty take time off from school or drop out. Almost half the people who go to college never graduate. Except in the case of a few high-fliers and a somewhat larger number of inveterate slackers, college is a stressful experience.

American colleges notoriously inflate grades, but they can never inflate them enough, because education in the United States has become hypercompetitive and every little difference matters. In 1960, Harvard College had around five thousand applicants and accepted roughly thirty per cent; this year, it had almost twenty-three thousand applicants and accepted nine per cent. And the narrower the funnel, the finer applicants grind themselves in order to squeeze through it. Perversely, though, the competitiveness is a sign that the system is doing what Americans want it to be doing. Americans want education to be two things, universal and meritocratic. They want everyone to have a slot who wants one, and they want the slots to be awarded according to merit. The system is not perfect: children from higher-income families enjoy an advantage in competing for the top slots. But there are lots of slots. There are more than four thousand institutions of higher education in the United States, enrolling more than seventeen million students. Can you name fifty colleges? Even if you could name a thousand, there would be three thousand you hadn't heard of. Most of these schools accept virtually all qualified applicants.



What makes for the stress is meritocracy. Meritocratic systems are democratic (since, in theory, everyone gets a place at the starting line) and efficient (since resources are not wasted on the unqualified), but they are huge engines of anxiety. The more purely meritocratic the system—the more open, the more efficient, the *fairer*—the more anxiety it produces, because there is no haven from competition. Your mother can't come over and help you out—that would be cheating! You're on your own. Everything you do in a meritocratic society is some kind of test, and there is never a final exam. There is only another test. People seem to pick up on this earlier and earlier in their lives, and at some point it starts to

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

get in the way of their becoming educated. You can't learn when you're afraid of being wrong.

The biggest undergraduate major by far in the United States today is business. Twenty-two per cent of bachelor's degrees are awarded in that field. Eight per cent are awarded in education, five per cent in the health professions. By contrast, fewer than four per cent of college graduates major in English, and only two per cent major in history. There are more bachelor's degrees awarded every year in Parks, Recreation, Leisure, and Fitness Studies than in all foreign languages and literatures combined. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which classifies institutions of higher education, no longer uses the concept "liberal arts" in making its distinctions. This makes the obsession of some critics of American higher education with things like whether Shakespeare is being required of English majors beside the point. The question isn't what the English majors aren't taking; the question is what everyone else isn't taking.

More than fifty per cent of Americans spend some time in college, and American higher education is the most expensive in the world. The average annual tuition at a four-year private college is more than twenty-two thousand dollars. What do we want from college, though? It is hard to imagine that there could be one answer that was right for each of the 1.5 million or so people graduating this year, one part of the college experience they all must have had. Any prescription that had to spread itself across that many institutions would not be very deep. One thing that might be hoped for, though, is that, somewhere along the way, every student had a moment of vertigo (without unpleasant side effects). In commencement speeches and the like, people say that education is all about opportunity and expanding your horizons. But some part of it is about shrinking people, about teaching them that they are not the measure of everything. College should give them the intellectual equivalent of their childhood sleepover experience. We want to give graduates confidence to face the world, but we also want to protect the world a little from their confidence. Humility is good. There is not enough of it these days.

—*Louis Menand*

POSTCARD FROM PARIS

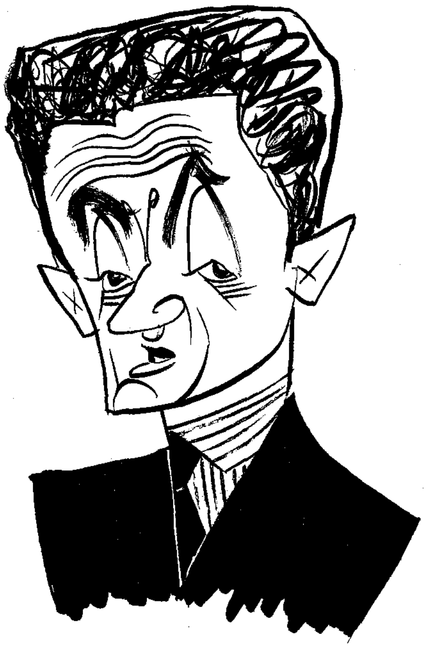
SÉGO-SARKO

For a nation trembling in the balance, the France that awoke on May 6th was not looking too rough. Paris, in particular, lolled on a dazzling Sunday, as if the second round of the Presidential election, between the Socialist Ségolène Royal and the champion of the right, Nicolas Sarkozy—"Ségo-Sarko," in its most abrupt form—were no more than a passing cloud. At noon, on the Boulevard Saint-Germain, a melee arose, but closer inspection revealed it to be a swarm of Ukrainian worshippers emerging from Mass. True political ferment was to be found eight hundred yards away, at the *mairie* of the Seventh Arrondissment, where crowds of two or three strolled through the gates to vote. Luc Ferry, the philosopher, former Minister of Education, and author of "What Is a Successful Life?," arrived with two flawless children and a wife in three-inch heels.

The first round of the election had been a free-for-all, with a roster of candidates that included the leader of the Fishing, Hunting, Nature, and Traditions Party; a Communist postman of undisputed charm; and an anti-globalizing farmer whose mustache alone appeared to be the product of an agricultural subsidy. With the list trimmed to two, a frantic fortnight ensued, with a strict campaigning budget—half of it later reimbursed by the state—allotted to each candidate. There was a head-to-head debate, in the course of which it was Mme. Royal, not the reputedly combustible Sarkozy, who suffered a loss of temper. Best of all, from midnight on the final Friday until the start of voting, on Sunday, there was a ban on polls. "A period of reflection," a Sarkozy supporter said.

By seven o'clock on Sunday evening, the conditions were no longer reflective. Royal's followers, or "Royalistes," rustled outside her campaign headquarters, where murky rumors were already on the loose. A placard warned against "Sarko-Maso," a semi-sexual taunt suggesting that France, by voting for the right, would knowingly inflict pain on itself. Suddenly, amid the hubbub, an ivory blur: the leader in the flesh, her smile intact, sailing through the flashbulbs with that faint uplift of the head with which the nobly defeated used to mount the tumbrel. By the time she reached the home of the Socialist Party, on the Rue de Solférino, the scrum had stiffened into a crush. The countdown began, all gazes lifted to a giant screen: no hanging chads here, just a crisp announcement of the winner at eight o'clock.

Sarkozy, fifty-three per cent; Royal, forty-seven. Recriminations welled up faster than the tears. There was derisive anger at Sarkozy's use of the media—"He pulls the strings," one Royaliste said—and, behind the wrath, a touching belief that a modern election might still be won without such puppeteering. When the winner appeared onscreen and paid his respects to Royal, placing himself at the service of her supporters, they replied with a forest of raised middle fingers; the left likes nothing less than to be patronized. A book editor, born in Morocco, summarized Sarkozy's tactics: "menace and seduction." Who had been seduced? "People who live in a bubble and know nothing of life beyond," according to a pair of weeping sisters.



Nicolas Sarkozy

The bubble was currently floating across the Place de la Concorde, where a victory concert had begun. The victor himself was nowhere in sight, having done what any self-respecting President-elect should do: go out to dinner at Fouquet's. Awaiting your hero for more than two hours is no hardship to the faithful; standing for two hours without earplugs, however, while the cream of soft Euro-rock is hosed into your consciousness, is another matter. Even as Sarkozy was, presumably, still hesitating over his dessert menu, the comedian Jean-Marie Bigard—built like a night-club bouncer, but less funny—urged the restive mob to sing the word "Sarkozy" to the tune of "Happy Birthday." Just as one wondered whether the new regime might crash before it had started, the mood rose: cometh five past eleven, cometh the man.

Sarkozy, a fine orator but hardly a born smiler, seemed more impatient than relieved; triumphalism does not become him, being no substitute for work. The same briskness infects his troops—a blander, better-dressed bunch than their foes in the Rue de Solférino. One man in the Place de la Concorde, interviewed in mid-throng, explained that he worked in information systems and, above the music, bellowed out a précis of Sarkozy's plans for a pensions overhaul. Onstage, Sarkozy was sounding like a lover at the start of an affair. "I will not betray you, I will not lie to you, I will not deceive you," he told the country. Beside him stood his wife, Cécilia, making her first appearance of the day. She had not been with him when he voted in the morning, an absence that would be inconceivable in the United States. It is a measure of the pride with which France defends the inviolability of private life that nobody seems to know, or care, whether Mme. Sarkozy will accompany her husband when he moves into the Elysée Palace, on May 16th. The morning after his success, the newspaper *Libération*—no friend to Sarkozy—devoted twenty-two pages to the election and one line to the new First Lady. "White pants, gray sweater," the paper reported, and left it at that.

—*Anthony Lane*

THE BOARDS
COLLABORATORS

Just before the opening, at the Biltmore, of "LoveMusik"—about the composer Kurt Weill and his on-again, off-again singer-actress wife, Lotte Lenya—the show's director, Harold Prince, was hustling around the stage making last-minute changes. His hair is white and sparse, with matching fragments of mustache and beard. He wore a creaseless chino suit and impeccable Tod's loafers. "LoveMusik" is his first new Broadway musical in nine years.

Prince stood briefly in an aisle among the deserted seats and kept an eye on his choreographer, Patricia Birch, as she urged more speed in a dance trio's bit. "Sometimes you go to work because you just have to work, but for this one I couldn't wait to do the work," he said. "All that Weill music! I started listening to it when I was eight. The melodies affected me so deeply. His music sings for the Old World, yet it's extremely modern, and influenced by American jazz. It's redolent of melancholy and love, innocence and humor. Weill was open to everything. He wrote with courage."

Prince clamped on a pair of horn-rimmed glasses and studied his script. "I want to be sure our dialogue mentions the names of the important Weill shows," he said. "He had the best lyricists, like Ira Gershwin. We use Ira's songs, like 'Girl of the Moment' and 'Come to Paris,' but we should mention the title of that great show 'Lady in the Dark,' which Gershwin wrote." He made a note and went on, "Weill had twelve great lyricists, like Ogden Nash, Bertolt Brecht. We've got 'September Song' and 'It Never Was You,' both remarkable songs with lyrics by Maxwell Anderson, from 'Knickerbocker Holiday.' No one else ever had that many collaborators."

Across the aisle, he spotted "LoveMusik"'s book writer, Alfred Uhry, who was wearing jeans and an untucked corduroy shirt. He was nervously clutching his script to his midriff. After a fast conference, Uhry retired to the back of the theatre.

"I was born just in time to meet the great musical people," Prince said. "I started working for George Abbott in 1948, as his office boy, and he used to take me along with his dates to all the parties, including a memorable country-weekend one, for Arthur Schwartz's wedding. I met all the great theatre figures—Moss Hart, Oscar Hammerstein, Richard Rodgers, Dorothy Fields. They were uncommonly kind and encouraging, even Irving Berlin, who wrote to compliment me for casting I had done for 'Call Me Madam.' Then I was drafted into the Army, during the Korean War, and spent a year in Germany, writing a guidebook, but taking in whatever was musical in Stuttgart and Munich. When I got out of the Army, I went back to work with George Abbott. We were close until the day he died, at the age of a hundred and seven.

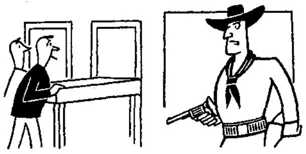
"I had to wait until I was twenty-six to see 'The Threepenny Opera' and Lotte Lenya, who played Jenny in it. It was Off Broadway, in 1954. I got to work with Lotte in 1966, when I directed her in 'Cabaret.' She was wonderful. Some people seem to think of her as the Rosa Klebb character that she played in 'From Russia with Love.' She has a line in our show. 'I never lied to you,' she says to Weill. The fact is, she never lied to anybody. I remember posing with her, on the first day of rehearsals, for a photo shoot. I put my arm around her, and I could feel her shaking."

He continued, "Alfred and I both have long marriages. And there's a lot about marriage in our show. We both understand how the burden on your family is as great as the one on you, without the perks. 'LoveMusik' has been percolating for four years. I sent 'Speak Low,' the book of Weill-Lenya love letters, to Alfred. He then sat listening to Kurt Weill's music for twenty-four hours."

Uhry reappeared, waving a new page, and told Prince, triumphantly, that he had written a new line for the Brecht character, which included a mention of "Lady in the Dark."

—*Lillian Ross*

THE PICTURES
TOUGH GUY



Late on a recent Saturday afternoon, Norman Mailer, equipped with two canes, willed his eighty-four-year-old hips and knees up three flights of stairs in his Brooklyn Heights brownstone. He'd just flown down from Provincetown, and within the hour about fifty people were due for a cocktail party. A tactical error, Mailer realized. He should have travelled a day earlier. Given more time, he said, "I could have studied a list of names of everyone who's coming," but he was too immersed in the research for his next novel.

In Provincetown, in the fall of 1986, Mailer directed a film adaptation of his novel "Tough Guys Don't Dance." When it was released, the reviews tended not to flatter. (The Washington *Post:* "hysterical, incoherent and blasphemously original. . . . You never know if you're laughing with, or at, the movie.") No matter—the virtually unanimous opinion of the "Tough Guys" cast and crew was that working on the picture had been a great adventure, and they adored the director. There had been serious complications with a couple of labor unions (including Teamsters of the gun-toting variety), memorable night shoots (of the freezing-asses-off variety), the usual on-location romances and hotel-room trashings, and an amusing vagueness about whether the end product would be a noirish mystery or perhaps an inadvertently surreal comedy. ("Tarantino before its time," according to the film's producer, Tom Luddy. "Long, florid dialogue punctuated by grotesque violence followed by more long, florid dialogue and then more grotesque violence.") After the filming ended, it was agreed that, at some future date, a reunion should take place. This happened in 1991, in Los Angeles. Last year, Luddy and Caroline Baron, who had been a production coördinator in 1986, started tracking down "Tough Guys" alumni for a twentieth-anniversary get-together.

"Ninety per cent of the people we called told us they wanted to come," Baron said, while waiting for Mailer, who had retreated to a bedroom to recuperate. "There was only one actor we weren't able to find. Ryan O'Neal. Whereabouts unknown."

Mailer made his way to the living room, where he spent most of the evening in a mustard-colored armchair. He wore a blue-gray corduroy shirt and loose-fitting dark pants. Behind him were sliding glass doors and a deck with a front-row view of the harbor at sunset, the tip of Manhattan in silhouette, a rippling pink sky. The arriving guests were obviously delighted to see him. Ira Lewis, who had a small role in "Tough Guys" and was also a dialogue coach, told Mailer how terrific he'd been during a recent appearance at Hunter College. Mailer seemed not to recall the occasion.

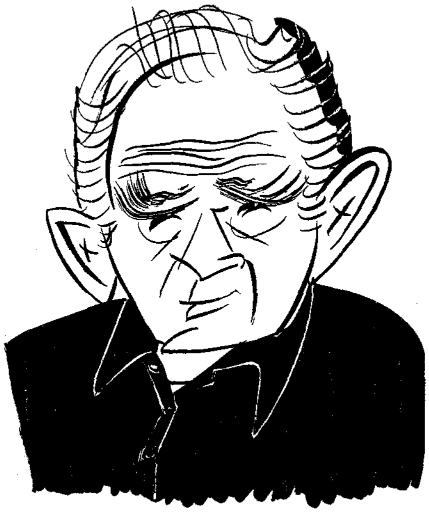
Chez Pierre
PRO-AMERICAN FRENCH CUISINE

Sounding exactly like Norman Mailer—expansive, rat-a-tat-tat—he explained, "It's awful—I'm absolutely without detail memory now. I keep referring to one metaphor: an old man who's still steering a course is analogous to the captain of an old freighter that may or may not make it to port. You keep throwing ballast overboard. So the hearing goes. The eyesight. The knees. This goes. That goes. Because what you've also got is the awareness that you're keeping the boat on course. And jettisoning certain ballast is the modus operandi. For a novelist, you really have to retain a memory of how things felt even if you're not reporting them directly. My memory for details of where something took place, when it happened, is very spotty. What I will remember is the emotional tone of a meeting. Facts you can always look up somewhere. If you're writing a novel, you try to keep the navigator going. If it veers off course, you're in trouble. Henry James used to talk about 'the keeping up.' He was referring to Zola. I knew exactly what he meant. On a given day, if you take the wrong turn you can lose six months. You try to steer it out of instinct."

An hour or so into the party, everyone gathered to explain what their roles had been in the making of "Tough Guys." When Mailer's turn came, he singled out Tom Luddy, who had defended him against one of the film's financers, Menahem Golan: "Menahem always said, 'Tom, I will never stab you from behind. I will kill you from the front.' One morning, Tom's phone rings at 5 A.M. Menahem is saying, 'Tom, my knife is at your throat. Tom, you've given me Norman Mailer as a director. I've been talking to people in Hollywood, and they tell me he's crazy. You've given me a crazy man for a director. I could strangle you.' "

"Tough Guys" turned out to be the last movie Mailer directed, but not the end of his celluloid legacy. At one point, Leslie Shatz, the sound designer, described Mailer's perfectionist quest to capture the sound of a punch in the face.

"Norman said, 'The sounds of punches in movies are all phony,' " Shatz recalled. "He wanted me to record his own punches. He was a boxer, of course. So we were in my cutting room with a portable digital recorder, and I remember thinking at the time, I'm watching Norman Mailer hit himself and I'm not stopping him. He hit himself at least twenty times—in the face and the chest—until we finally got it right. I saved that sound effect, and I've used it in about twenty movies since. I always tell other directors, 'You hear that? That's Norman Mailer punching himself. He's in your movie.' "



Norman Mailer

—*Mark Singer*

AT THE ZOO
SEE NO EVIL

Mike White, the screenwriter and actor ("Chuck & Buck," "School of Rock"), passed through the city the other day to promote his film "Year of the Dog," his directorial début. It stars Molly Shannon as a secretary who goes to pieces after the death of her beagle. She becomes a vegan and an animal-rights activist. At first, you think White is making fun of her, but then you come to realize that he's in her corner. Still, a certain ambiguity of tone, a typical White trait, makes you wonder where he really stands on the question of, say, killing animals for clothes, food, or sport.

Here's the news: White stands opposed. He is, in his own words, an "imperfect vegan"—he eats fish and wears leather belts. Two years ago, he acquired two French bulldogs that looked to him like pigs, which got him thinking differently about meat. Then he read a book about the emotional lives of farm animals. That sealed it.

One windy morning during his New York visit, he accepted an invitation to stroll over to the Central Park Zoo and have a look around. He wore a down vest over a hooded sweatshirt. He's a very fair and slightly built redhead. If there's any scorn in him, he disguises it well. He is the mildest of wise guys, the gentlest of imps. Asked how much time he had to go zooing, he said, "I have till I don't remember. I have something sometime."

The first stop was the Tisch Children's Zoo. "Is it a children's zoo because all the animals are children?" he asked. "Or is it that only children can appreciate these particular animals?" Almost immediately, he found something to appreciate: a pig-nosed turtle. "Those are two of my favorite things. Turtles and pigs. I love snub-nosed anything. I have two snub-nosed dogs. I also have two cats. Actually, one of them just croaked. So I have one cat." As for human family, White has a father who was an evangelical minister and a ghostwriter for Jerry Falwell, and who later came out of the closet and now runs a gay ministry called Soulforce; and a mother who is "a church lady," according to White. He grew up in Pasadena.

White passed into an aviary whose inhabitants—ducks, lily pads—failed to impress him. "Are there little monkeys, do you think?" he wondered. "Oh, there's some goats, dude." Outside the aviary, he bought a handful of feed for fifty cents and began feeding the goats, issuing a range of exclamations as their tongues lapped his palm: "Geez. Yuck. Awww. This is so cool."

Afterward, at the hand-washing station, he asked, "So you thought the movie was perplexing?" He went on, "I hate movies where people are punished for their idiosyncrasies, when they're institutionalized or something." His heroine in "Year of the Dog" winds up embracing hers, and finding some measure of contentment. "You get to a place, as you get older, where everybody's life choice becomes their religion, in a way," he said. Before he could elaborate, he was distracted by an alpaca. "Is that a farm animal?" He read from the sign next to the pen. " 'It spits . . . a foul-smelling stream. . . . It's harmless. . . . Don't tease them with food.' " He avoided the alpaca and looked in the direction of the grownup zoo: "Let's go see a monkey."

Eventually, he came upon a pair of snow monkeys—mother and child, apparently—sitting on a rock in an enclosure. "Look! Monkeys! Look at those monkeys. Look at their red asses." He watched them engage in a series of ambiguously violent gestures—squeeze, swat, bite, slap—which, to his eyes, indicated maternal and filial affection. "Don't eat monkey," he said.

He ducked inside, into the rain-forest exhibit, in search of other monkeys. The heat and humidity were jarring. "I'm surprised there aren't more homeless people in here," he said. Passing a coiled boa constrictor, he confirmed that he was a bit of an ophidiophobe: "Last night, I had a dream that there was a snow snake coming down from a snow mountain to kill me. A camouflaged snow snake."

Before he could interpret this dream, he came upon a small colony of colobus monkeys, including one that was just a month old. "Look at that little monkey baby," he said. "Don't eat it." A nanny strode up, with a toddler in tow. She announced that she frequently took him to the zoo and that the monkeys were his favorites. But, despite her exhortations ("Monkeys, monkeys, monkeys!"), he seemed uninterested. Instead, the boy looked up at White and said, "I love Daddy."

"You love Daddy?" White asked.

"Daddy. Daddy."

"He thinks I'm his daddy," White said, with a note of queasiness. He didn't know what to make of this, either.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

WOODWARD VS. TENET

The new intelligence war.

BY JEFFREY GOLDBERG

The former director of Central Intelligence George Tenet, who for the past two weeks has been the most comprehensively excoriated man in America, keeps an office at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. It is cramped and badly ventilated. He has had two offices at the school, where his title is distinguished professor in the practice of diplomacy. Tenet asked to be moved from the first after discovering that Douglas J. Feith, the former Under-Secretary of Defense for policy, who was one of the principal architects of the Iraq war, kept an office nearby. Feith, a neo-conservative whose title at Georgetown is visiting professor and distinguished practitioner in national-security policy, has been a nemesis of Tenet's, and though Feith told me that he has tried to be friendly to Tenet—"I'm civil with everybody"—Tenet has shown no interest in reciprocating.

Tenet's current quarters are almost too small to contain him; he is a large and perpetually restless man. He is twitchy even when talking about agreeable subjects, like the C.I.A.'s successful infiltration of Afghanistan following the attacks of September 11, 2001. On television, and in particular in an interview he gave to "60 Minutes" on April 29th, he sometimes appears physically uncontrolled and alarmingly emotional. His friends acknowledge with regret that Tenet's televised fidgeting has been misinterpreted as a sign of instability or untrustworthiness. "You saw how he was shifting in his chair, how he was in the interviewer's face?" John McLaughlin, the former deputy C.I.A. director, said. "Well, that's just energy. Maybe he should have dialled it back a little. But don't you want someone who's responsible for fighting terrorism to get in your face and confront the issues?"

In person, Tenet makes an impression that's not so dramatic, but when the conversation shifts to unhappy subjects, such as the words for which he has become most famous—the statement, made to George W. Bush and first reported by Bob Woodward, that the Administration had a "slam dunk" case on the question of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction—or for the critical reaction to his new memoir, he becomes agitated, interrupting others, and himself, and chewing on the stub of a cigar. The book, "At the Center of the Storm," for which Tenet received a four-million-dollar advance, is selling well—it will enter the *Times'* best-seller list in the top spot on May 20th—but it has been broadly, and derisively, panned. Tenet has done an uncommon thing in Washington—uniting columnists on opposite sides of the Iraq war in their contempt for him. "Tenet presents himself as a pathetic victim and scapegoat of an administration that was hellbent on going to war, slam dunk or not," the columnist Charles Krauthammer wrote in the *Post*. In the *Times*, Maureen Dowd was coldly dismissive, writing, "If you have something deadly important to say, say it when it matters, or just shut up and slink off." On the *New Republic* Web site, the international-relations expert Ronald Steel wrote that Tenet "exemplifies the rule that those in high places will endure virtually any humiliation before surrendering a position of power."

Some of the criticism can be shrugged off. Feith, who himself has been widely upbraided for mismanagement of the war and for manipulating intelligence to make the case for a meaningful connection between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, reviewed the book negatively in the *Wall Street Journal*. And McLaughlin pointed out that one of Tenet's more ubiquitous critics, a former intelligence official named Larry Johnson, was known to have downplayed the Islamist terrorist threat in the weeks before September 11th. Johnson published an Op-Ed article in the *Times* on July 10, 2001, in which he argued that

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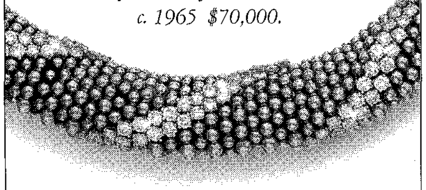

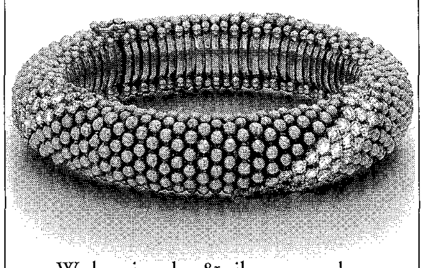

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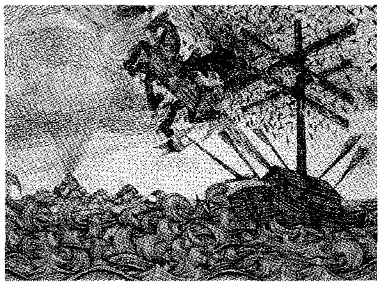

Andrew Schoultz, "Slaveship Projection #2," 2006, 22" x 30", mixed media on paper. Private collection, courtesy Andrew Schoultz and Taylor De Cordoba, Los Angeles.

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"there are bureaucracies in the military and in intelligence agencies that are desperate to find an enemy to justify budget growth." On the same day, McLaughlin noted, the C.I.A. became convinced that a devastating attack by Al Qaeda was a near-term certainty.

STEVE
BRODNER
2007

Woodward's view will likely be seen as the definitive word on Tenet's career.

STEVE BRODNER

For Tenet, the more painful criticism has come from someone who once appeared to view him with respect—Bob Woodward, perhaps Washington's most influential reporter and the author of three best-sellers about the Administration's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Tenet acknowledges in his book that he has helped Woodward, and the two were known to be friendly. In fact, Tenet met with Woodward before writing his memoir, in order to seek Woodward's advice. In the book-review section of the *Post* on May 6th, Woodward called Tenet's account a "remarkable, important and often unintentionally damning" book. He accused Tenet of being "all over the lot" in his explanations of the slam-dunk comment, and, more significant, chastised Tenet for misunderstanding the relationship between C.I.A. directors and the Presidents they serve. Tenet, Woodward wrote, was "hampered by a bureaucrat's view of the world, hobbled by the traditional chain of command, convinced that the CIA director's 'most important relationship with any administration official is generally with the national security adviser.' " Woodward then wrote, in a distinctly parental tone, "No. Your most important relationship is with the president."

Woodward's disappointment with Tenet appears to run deep. He wrote that, though he hoped Tenet "would provide intimate portraits of the two presidents he had served as CIA director . . . instead, he has adhered to the rule of CIA directors: protect the president at all costs." Unlike most other reviewers, Woodward found redeeming features in the book, including chapters on Al Qaeda and its motivations and on the nuclear smuggling network headed by the Pakistani scientist A. Q. Khan. But Woodward's position in Washington is such that his view will likely be seen as the definitive word on Tenet's career, and certainly on his memoir. The review itself carries with it another meaning: just as a request from Woodward for an interview can be a signal of arrival in official Washington, a public scolding suggests that one is no longer a useful, well-placed source.

When I saw Tenet in his office last week, in the company of his former spokesman Bill Harlow, who co-wrote the memoir, I asked if he was surprised by the ferocious reaction.

"I think that Iraq is still a very raw issue for our public," Tenet said. He rubbed his face vigorously as he continued, "It's very controversial in the country. It's been four years. And one of the things that strike me is people are making the conclusion that as I was living in the moment—as we were living in that moment—we knew all the things that were going to go wrong and we didn't say, 'Stop.' "

Was he was referring to the W.M.D. question?

"No, no, no!" he said. "First of all, let's separate the W.M.D. piece, O.K.? So we said there were weapons of mass destruction, and we were wrong on that point. I got that piece. No, there's a second piece, the postwar—what happens after the invasion phase." Tenet argues in his book that the C.I.A. understood well that the postwar occupation of Iraq would not necessarily go smoothly, especially if the Iraqi Army was disbanded. Still, the central question concerns the C.I.A.'s prewar assessment of Iraq's purported stock of weapons of mass destruction. This assessment stands as one of two chief failures of the C.I.A. under Tenet (the other being the agency's lack of tactical intelligence about the September 11th plot). Attempts to raise the question seemed to fluster Tenet.

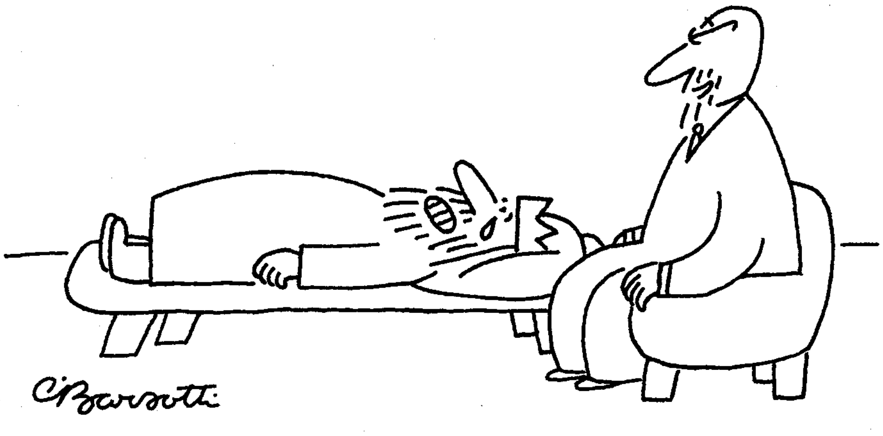
"Well, the only thing I can say—I mean, well, I think people may believe that we knew all the answers to these questions," he said. "And then there's the whole 'Well, why didn't you resign?' But wait a minute. I had, you know—anybody has misgivings about going to war. And I thought about this. In my view, there's a little bit of misunderstanding about the job of director. I mean, you know, you don't cross that policy line. You're supposed to provide objective assessments and analysis. They"—policymakers—"make decisions on the policies they're going to make. Obviously, you know, we said what we said about W.M.D. They do the cost-benefit, risk calculation about what they think that means. We don't. They do."

Tenet was a crucial player in a meeting, held three months before the launch of the war, where he used the expression "slam dunk." Tenet contends that the phrase was a reference not to actual intelligence about W.M.D. but, rather, to the ability to strengthen the Administration's case for war. He also seemed to suggest that he might not have said it at all.

Woodward, in his 2004 book "Plan of Attack," described the meeting this way:

> Bush turned to Tenet. "I've been told all this intelligence about having WMD and this is the best we've got?"
>
> From the end of one of the couches in the Oval Office, Tenet rose up, threw his arms in the air. "It's a slam dunk case!" the DCI said.
>
> Bush pressed, "George, how confident are you?"
>
> Tenet, a basketball fan who attended as many home games of his alma mater Georgetown as possible, leaned forward and threw his arms up again. "Don't worry, it's a slam dunk!"

Tenet says that Woodward's account was not an accurate reflection of the meeting, and that he has witnesses to back him up. "For me, the irony is that there are five of our guys in the room, five C.I.A. people, and three of the five don't remember it even being said," Tenet told me. And if he did say it, Tenet says, he certainly didn't jump up from the couch to make the point.



"Oh well, what does a jester know?"

Woodward, in his *Post* review, claimed to have at least four sources for this moment. In a conversation last week, Woodward said that Tenet "can't leave it alone."

"He's fried about 'slam dunk,' " Woodward said. "I say in 'State of Denial' that he has a strong case that 'slam dunk' didn't cause the war." He added, "I don't know that these other C.I.A. officials were there. I say he rose from the couch—look at the '60 Minutes' interview—he does it all the time."

Tenet's main disagreement with Woodward, though, is his contention that Tenet was derelict in his duties by not bringing his fears of an imminent attack directly to the President on July 10, 2001, when the C.I.A. received information that, Tenet wrote, "literally made my hair stand on end."

Instead of taking the matter to Bush, with whom he met nearly every day, he briefed Condoleezza Rice, then the national-security adviser. On "60 Minutes," Scott Pelley asked Tenet, "Why aren't you telling the President, 'Mr. President, this is terrifying. We have to do this now?' "

Tenet replied, "The President is not the action officer. You bring the action to the national-security adviser and people who set the table for the President to decide on policies they're going to implement."

Woodward, in his review, wrote, "Whoa! That's a startling admission. I'm pretty certain that President Bush or any president, for that matter, would consider himself or herself the action officer when it comes to protecting the country from terrorism."

When I mentioned Woodward's contention to Tenet, he said, "You know, I don't want to talk about Woodward. I really have no interest in talking about it."

"He's talking about you," I said.

"Well, that's O.K. He does what he does. I've told my side of this equation."

He paused for a moment, and then his view of Woodward burst forth: "I mean, the one thing I object to, you know, the one thing I really object to, is 'You didn't tell the President.' There's nothing about the threat reporting in that period that I didn't tell the President correctly about. So there's this one meeting that occurs—the President understood—look, it started in the spring. Look, we wrote any number of pieces about the potential for a large attack against U.S. interests. I mean, he knew exactly what we were doing overseas." He continued, "So maybe Woodward thinks, Well if you wanted covert action, you should have gone to the President. Well, no, I'm sorry. Direct? If you wanted covert action—well, I remember directors that went directly to the President, around a policy process, to get a covert action going. That doesn't work. You don't jump the principals and say, 'Give me covert action.' So it's good for Bob to say that, but the point is that's how I believed this worked. There's a disciplined process of governance. I got enough cowboy to last me a lifetime that spring and summer"—of 2001. "We're running down people, we're moving people, you know, there are renditions going on, we're talking to people, we catch the guy who's going to bomb the Embassy in Paris, we got to get him moved, there are plots against the Embassy in Rome, we got plots in Turkey, we got guys crossing the borders in Saudi Arabia with detonators and manuals—we've got enough going on."

When I reported Tenet's response to Woodward, he said, "I hate to say this, but I think the world agrees with me. Governments and Presidents expedite things all the time. . . . President Bush told me he didn't feel that sense of urgency, and that his blood was not boiling before September 11th. I would argue that Tenet's job was to boil the President's blood. That's why you show up on the President's doorstep. I'm raised in a culture where you don't observe the chain of command, you go around. Read 'All the President's Men.' Who was my 'action officer'? Ben Bradlee"—then the executive editor of the *Post*. "If something is that important, you go to your action officer."

At that point, Woodward read to me a dramatic passage from "All the President's Men," the book about the Watergate scandal that he wrote with his former *Post* colleague Carl Bernstein, in which Mark Felt, the F.B.I. official known as Deep Throat, suggested that the reporters' lives were in danger. Woodward and Bernstein decided to go directly to Bradlee's house, even though it was after 2 A.M.:

> They got into Woodward's car. They decided not to talk in the car, either. Several blocks from Bradlee's house, they called him from a pay phone. He says come over, Bernstein said.
>
> The reporters had never been to Bradlee's house, and they had wondered how the boss lived. The streetlights created a half-dark atmosphere. As they approached the porch, a barking dog charged out. A man stepped out of the dim shadows. It was Bradlee, his hair combed, his voice and eyes sleepy.

Woodward paused, and said, "Sometimes there come points in your life when you have to make a decision about what you're going to do and they don't tell you in the morning that this is the day that one of those decisions is going to come. Do you break down the doors, do you break out of the system? This is the issue of courage."

Bradlee, who retired in 1991, said, "Oh, Jesus, I remember that. We were really one-on-one throughout that story. He called me up and said he had to see me in the middle of the fucking night—Bernstein, too—and they made me come outside because they thought the house was bugged. I was in my jammies, for Chrissake." I asked Bradlee if he agreed with Woodward that Tenet had abdicated his responsibilities on July 10, 2001. "It seems to me elementary that if you've got the story that's going to dominate history you might as well go right to the President," Bradlee said.

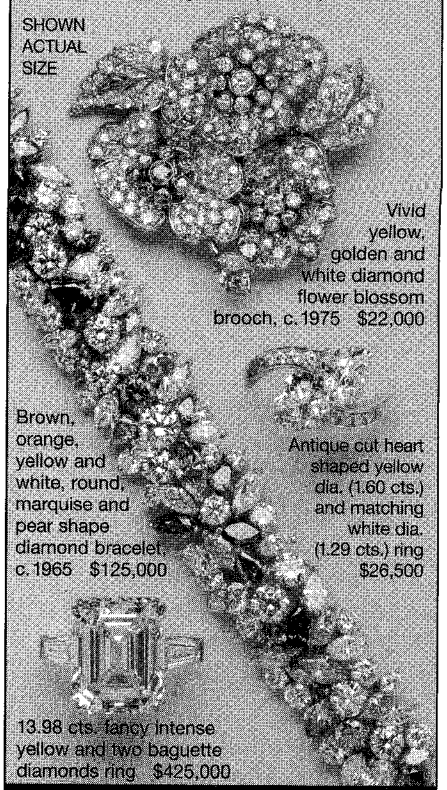
Woodward has been criticized for his review, and for the extent of his entanglements with Washington's most powerful figures. Sydney Schanberg, the Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, says that the review is "more like an explanation of how Tenet could have been a better intelligence chief and written a better memoir if only he had listened to Bob Woodward."

Tenet uncharacteristically demurred when I asked him if he felt betrayed by Woodward's rendering of his career, but he said, "The friends I've had are the friends I'm always going to have. None of my friends have abandoned me."

Woodward disputed the impression that he was, in fact, a friend of Tenet's. "I've always kept a real distance," he said. "I never went to his house, never socialized at all. I maybe went to one party or two while he was there. I don't want to belabor the point, but Maureen Dowd was complaining that Tenet socialized with Woodward and now Woodward's acting like a meanie." Dowd, in a recent column, wrote, in a mocking imitation of Tenet, "The worst meanie was horrid Bob Woodward. Slam"—Dowd's name for Tenet—"socialized with Bob and gave him lots of intel for his best sellers, but then Bob 'painted a caricature of me leaping into the air and simulating a slam dunk, not once but twice, with my arms flailing.'"

Tenet's reputation has no doubt suffered in part because C.I.A. directors rarely have political constituencies and defenders outside the ranks of the C.I.A. itself (and Tenet, by most accounts, remains popular there). But Tenet is perhaps especially vulnerable—a magnet for criticism—simply because he is the first of Bush's key national-security advisers to offer himself to the public with a memoir.

If the past is any guide, though, many memoirs will follow. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in response to a question from CNN's Wolf Blitzer about Tenet's assertion that she did not perform her job well, said, "Well, look, not everything went right. This was a very difficult circumstance. There were some things that went right and some things that went wrong. And you know what? We'll have a chance to look at that in history, and I'll have a chance to reflect on that when I have a chance to write my book." The next memoir, however, will most likely be Feith's. Titled "War and Decision," it is scheduled to appear this fall. Feith told me that he would not be "attacking" Tenet but would point out areas in which Tenet and others elided the truth. When I asked Feith if he himself would tell the whole truth, he replied, "Telling the whole truth is an impossible standard." ♦



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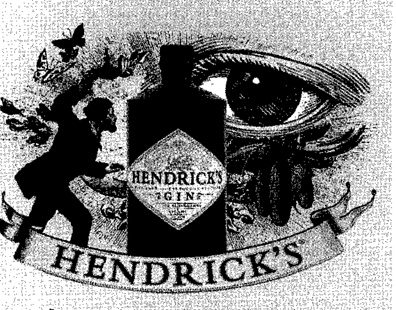

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SHARE OUR JOY

BY LARRY DOYLE

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Friends and Family! I can't tell you how excited Dave and I are that you'll be able to join us as we Pledge our Love! Below you'll find all the info you need to help us make this Occasion as Special and Perfect as we have planned.

Guest Policy

E-vites are for the Guest only; there is no "implied plus-one." We're sorry, but it's a very small mountaintop, with limited ruins. We have gone to exhaustive lengths to achieve a proper mix of personalities, races, classes, ages, and orientations to insure a Fun and Romantic Event for all. So don't be surprised to find that your True Plus-One is already there! (Though just one plus-one per guest, please. Do you hear me, Erika?)

We regret, too, the no-children rule. Some of us feel that Children bring nothing but Joy to all occasions; others feel differently, and this is a discussion we've agreed to table until a later time. (Not *too* much later! Tick tick tick . . .) If it's any consolation, you'll be sparing your Little Loved Ones many painful inoculations, and then there's the whole child-slavery thing.

Directions

Upon arriving at the Aeropuerto Internacional Jorge Chávez, in Lima, look for the Aero Sendero terminal. It's a corrugated-metal shed. Sendero, your pilot, should be there (he looks just like Erik Estrada, had things not gone so well for him). His Piper Apache is completely airworthy, and, if it comes to it, somewhat seaworthy. After my father conducts a quick sobriety check, Sendero will wing you to a private airstrip on the shore of Lake Titicaca. From there, you'll travel via *balsa de totora*, or reed boat, to the island of Amantaní. Once ashore, llamas will take you up the mountainside of Pachatata (Father Earth), where you will be given a sleeping bag and assigned to a ruin.

A Few Travel Tips

- Do not let Sendero sell you any cocaine. We have made an exclusive arrangement with another supplier. Anybody wishing to partake of this local fare must contact Dave's brother Drake. If you fail to do so, we may find ourselves short a best man.
- Lake Titicaca is a sacred Inca site. Their god or something rose out of it. Mocking its name, or the name of nearby Lake Poopó, is considered incredibly rude and has resulted in spontaneous stabbings.
- Since Pachatata is 13,615 feet above sea level, you may not be able to breathe. We will have oxygen on hand, but in limited supplies, so, unless you are absolutely certain you are going to die, please be considerate of others.
- If you look directly at your llama, it will spit in your eyes.

The Ceremony

You will awaken at 2 A.M. (it'll be too cold to sleep anyway) and llama it down Pachatata and then up Pachamama (Earth Mother). We should arrive at the peak between 4:30 and 5:30, depending on bandits, in time to witness the first light of the Solstice, at 5:58. The Incas believe that if you stare into the sun as it rises on this day you will be Reawakened to the Ancient Knowledge of the Cosmos. Hopefully this will distract you from the sound of the seven llamas being slaughtered. (Some of you will have to walk back. Sorry.) Following a brief sacrifice to the Dragon Fertility Goddess (don't tell Dave!), we will enjoy a traditional breakfast of potatoes and *mate de coca*, which is basically boiled cocaine and which I'm told puts Starbucks to shame.

The ceremony will take place at noon, officiated by a Genuine Quechua Shaman and, at the insistence of Dave's mom, Father Mulcahy, who has promised to keep his pagan comments to a minimum. First, Shaman Klaatu will ritually purify the Bride and Groom (good luck with that!), and then we will exchange Personalized Vows written by me with input from Dave. In Andean tradition, the marriage will be sealed with an exchange of shoes. (Luv those Incas!)

The Reception

The reception is scheduled for 4 P.M., or whenever the llamas are done. We ask that after the ceremony you gather as much firewood and wild potatoes as you can. In lieu of champagne, we will be serving *chicha*, made by the island's women, who chew up corn and other things and spit it into an earthenware pot for fermenting. It takes a little getting used to, but consumed in vast quantities, as is the tradition, it can sneak up on you. Accordingly, the Shaman will remain on hand to perform additional marriages as necessary. Unfortunately, Dave and I will have to leave early in order to make our plane to the Galápagos. And please: if anybody ties beer cans to the back of our getaway llama, I will cry.

One Final Request

A lot of hard work and patience and tears and sexual compromise went into making this a Wonderful Celebration of Love. This is the wedding I've dreamed about ever since studying pre-Columbian civilization in the fifth grade. If you cannot enjoy and experience it appropriately, I ask that you strongly consider staying home with the rest of Dave's buddies. (That doesn't apply to you, Dave!) ♦

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AMERICAN CHRONICLES

THE MEANING OF LIFE

What Milton Bradley started.

BY JILL LEPORE

In 1860, the year Abraham Lincoln was elected President, a lanky, long-nosed, twenty-three-year-old Yankee named Milton Bradley invented his first board game, on a red-and-ivory checkerboard of sixty-four squares. He called it the Checkered Game of Life. Play starts at the board's lower-left corner, on an ivory square labelled Infancy—illustrated by a tiny, black-inked lithograph of a wicker cradle—and ends, usually but not always, at Happy Old Age, at the upper right, though landing on Suicide, with a noose around your neck, is more common than you might think, and means, inconveniently, that you're dead. "The game represents, as indicated by the name, the checkered journey of life," Bradley explained, in his Rules of the Game. There are good patches, and bad, in roughly equal number. On the one hand: Honesty, Bravery, Success. On the other: Poverty, Idleness, Disgrace. The wise player will strive "to gain on his journey that which shall make him the most prosperous, and to shun that which will retard him in his progress." But even when you're heading for Happiness you can end up at Ruin: passed out, drunk and drooling, on the floor of a seedy-looking tavern where Death darkens the door disguised as a debt collector straight out of "Bleak House"—the bulky black overcoat, the strangely sinister stovepipe hat.

The Checkered Game of Life made Milton Bradley a brand name. His company, founded in 1860, survived his death, in 1911, the Depression, two World Wars, and even my mother, who worked there in the nineteen-forties. In 1960, to celebrate its centennial, the Milton Bradley Company released a commemorative Game of Life. It bears almost no resemblance to its nineteenth-century namesake. In Life, players fill teensy plastic station wagons with even teensier pastel-pink and blue plastic Mommies and Daddies, spin the Wheel of Fate, and ride the highway of Life, earning money, buying furniture, and having pink and blue plastic babies. Along the way, there are good patches: "Adopt a Girl and Boy! Collect Presents!" And bad: "Jury Duty! Lose Turn." Whoever earns the most money wins. As the game's ad slogan has it, "That's Life!"

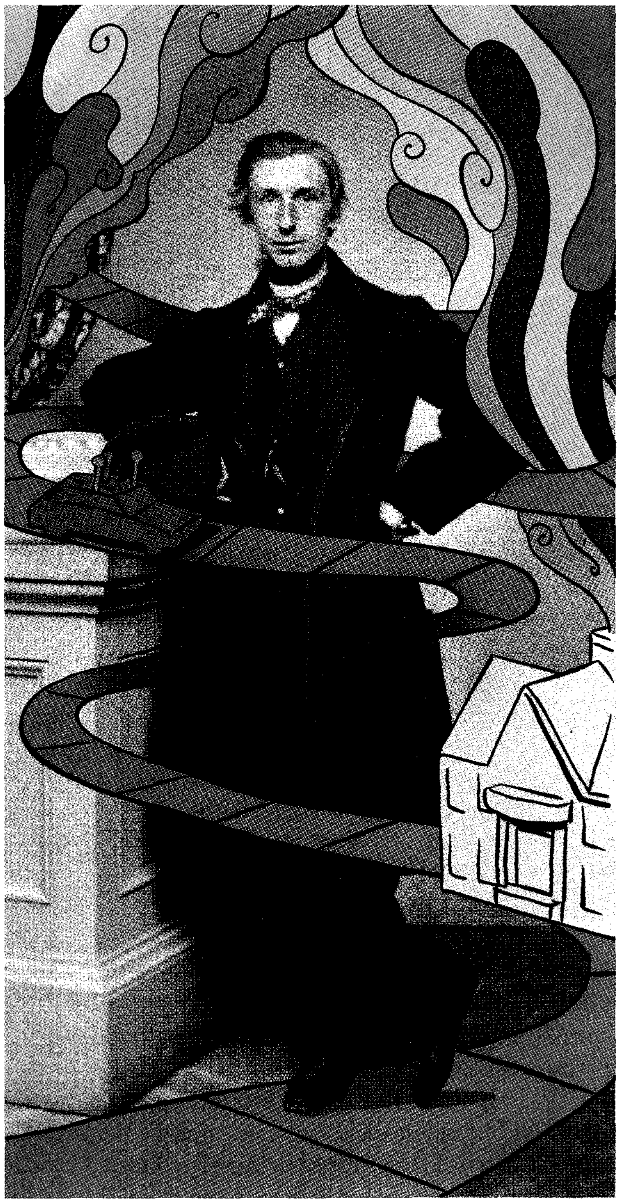
If, like me, you played the 1960 version of Life while wearing bell-bottoms and listening to a 45 of Elton John's "Rocket Man," you have a pretty good idea of what happened to Milton Bradley's nineteenth-century game about vice, virtue, and the pursuit of happiness: it was reinvented as a lesson in Cold War consumerist conformity, a kind of two-dimensional Levittown, complete with paychecks and retirement homes and dental bills. Inside the game box are piles and piles of paper (Life is . . . paperwork!): fake automobile insurance, phony stock certificates, pretend promissory notes, and play money, seven and a half million dollars of it, including a heap of mint-green fifty-thousand-dollar bills, each featuring a portrait of Milton Bradley near the end of his days—bearded, aged, antique.

In the board-game industry, the 1960 Game of Life, which has sold thirty-five million copies, is like that portrait of Old Man Bradley: a giant with gray whiskers, enjoying a very Happy Old Age. Only a handful of games have had as long a shelf life. (Who still plays Park and Shop, another game sold by the Milton Bradley Company in 1960, whose object was "to outsmart the other players by parking your car in a strategic place, completing your shopping quickly and being the first to return home"?) Beginning in 1992, Hasbro, the Rhode Island-based toy company that had acquired Milton Bradley eight years earlier, revised Life, slightly, to market it to the baby-boomer parents who had grown up with it: the station wagons became minivans, and, a few miles down life's highway, you could have a midlife crisis. Over the years, Hasbro has sold custom editions as movie and television tie-ins; if you have time on your hands, and a boundless tolerance for the cloying edginess of Nickelodeon, you can play the Game of Life in Bikini Bottom SpongeBob SquarePants Edition. Or not.

Last year, Hasbro asked, "What would the Monopoly game be like if it were invented today?" and released Monopoly Here & Now, with new game pieces that include a cell phone, a box of French fries, and a laptop. This year, Hasbro is asking the same question of Life. Its answer, the Game of Life: Twists & Turns, will hit stores this summer. But maybe a better question than "What would Life look like if it were invented in 2007?" is "How did Milton Bradley come to invent a game of life in the first place?" How, in other words, did Life begin?

"I, Milton Bradley, . . . have invented a new Social Game," Bradley declared on his patent application. But the genealogy of the Checkered Game of Life stretches back centuries. Bradley's invention is descended from a family of ancient Asian games—members of a genus that R. C. Bell, in his amazing compendium "Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations" (1960), labelled "square board race games"—whose common ancestor is probably a thousand years old. In India, Jñāna Chaupār (the "game of knowledge") is played much like the Checkered Game of Life: land on a virtue and you get to climb a ladder toward the god Vishnu and karmic liberation; land on a vice—or karmic impediment—and you're swallowed by a snake. (Beginning in 1892, Jñāna Chaupār was sold in Britain as Snakes and Ladders; in the United States, it survives today as Chutes and Ladders.)

How young Milton Bradley, on the eve of the Civil War, came to adapt an ancient Asian game to a red-and-ivory checkerboard featuring an American vision of the good life is nearly impossible to piece together from the scant documents about his life that survive. (Bradley kept a meticulous diary and, throughout his life, preserved his correspondence, which formed the basis of James J. Shea and Charles Mercer's 1960 biography of Bradley, "It's All in the Game," and which, at the time, were housed at the company headquarters, in Springfield and East Longmeadow, Massachusetts. Sometime between then and when I visited those archives, in 2006, the papers were lost or destroyed.) But he didn't have to look half a world away to imagine that life would make a good board game. There were plenty of examples closer to home.

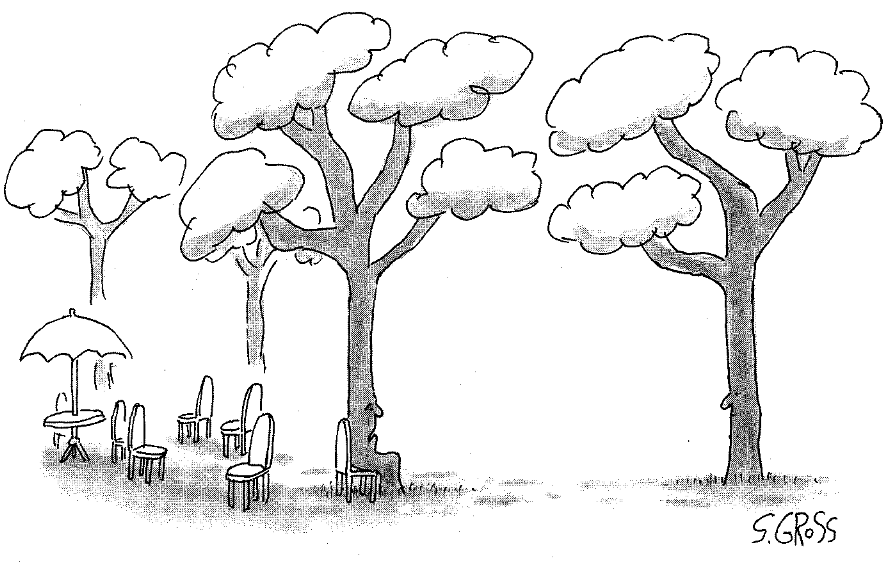


Bradley avowed that his game would promote virtue.

ILLUSTRATION BY ZOHAR LAZAR; PHOTO COURTESY CONNECTICUT VALLEY HISTORICAL MUSEUM

That life's a game that can be played well, or badly, is a very old idea and, at least in the last few centuries in the history of Western civilization, a commonplace one. The people in Thomas More's "Utopia" (1516) play a game of life, "not unlike our chess," consisting of "a battle between the virtues and the vices." How to win, and whether you're playing against yourself or against God or Satan, are matters of considerable philosophical speculation. "Man's life's a game at tables," read a seventeenth-century epitaph, "and he may / Mend his bad fortune, by his wiser play." The young Milton Bradley, too, believed that "the journey of life is governed by a combination of chance and judgment." His game works the same way: there's what you spin, and there's where you choose to go. The Checkered Game of Life is a game of destiny checked by strategy.

But Bradley came from a family ruled, for generations, by nothing so much as an angry God. The Bradleys had been in New England since 1635, when Daniel Bradley, an apothecary's son, settled in Salem, Massachusetts. Their sufferings were Biblical. Daniel was killed by Indians in 1689, six years before Abenakis captured his fifteen-year-old son, Isaac. In 1697, another son, his wife, two of their children, and three more Bradley children died in an attack on Haverhill in which Hannah Bradley, the wife of still another of Daniel's sons, was taken captive. She escaped, only to be captured again in 1704 and carried to Canada; on the journey, she gave birth to an infant who was killed when her captors poured hot embers into its mouth. Her husband, Joseph Bradley, trudged after her through waist-high snows, with his dog, to pay her ransom and bring her home. The next time an Indian came to her door, Hannah shot him. (She lived to be ninety, but her old age was probably more haunted than happy.) In 1739, two of the next generation of Bradleys, Samuel and Jonathan, were cut off in their youth in an ambush



"I'm tired."

• •

in New Hampshire. By the time Jonathan's direct descendant Milton was born, nearly a century later, and given the name of the Puritan author of "Paradise Lost," the family's fortunes had not gained much against adversity.

Still, the story of Bradley's ancestors was a story not of failure but of fate: God had chosen to visit them with affliction, and there was nothing they could do but praise Him. They would have had little patience for the eighteenth-century coffeehouse debate over which game life is most like. By the end of the century, the debate had become a cliché. "Sure, life's a game of cricket," a Bostonian joked in 1785. "Yet death has hit my wicket."

Milton Bradley's ancestors might have agreed with the English poet Nathaniel Cotton, who, in 1794, complained that the metaphor itself was heretical:

> That life's a game, divines confess;
> This says at cards, and that at chess;
> But if our views be center'd here,
> Tis all a losing game, I fear.

Profane or no, it was only a matter of time before the quip that life's a game inspired someone in England to *make* it a game. A board game called the New Game of Human Life was first sold in London in 1790. In an age still very much under the influence of John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" and Samuel Johnson's 1751 essay "Voyage of Life," it's hardly an accident that the New Game of Human Life was engraved and inked by a London printer who specialized in making maps: its Life is a journey along a twisty path from Infancy to Immortality, with eighty-four stops on the road, one for each year, in which the players' (or pilgrims') progress is speeded up by virtue and slowed down by vice. Land on the Duellist, at the square marked 22 (the twenty-second year of your life), and you'll be sent back to age 3 (for acting like a child); land on the Married Man, at 34, and you get to advance to the Good Father, at 56. Whoever dies first wins.

Like most "new" games, the New Game of Human Life was an old game tarted up. It adapted its board and rules from a game called the Royal Game of Goose, which was invented in Florence in the sixteenth century, and was itself descended from a class of board games that R. C. Bell calls "spiral race games." (The oldest spiral race game may be the Hyena Game, played by Arabs in Sudan, in a groove traced in the sand with a stick and involving a race between pebbles representing the players' mothers, who leave their village and head to a well at the spiral's center, where they must wash their clothes and return home before a hyena catches them.) By the seventeen-twenties, English printers had adapted the spiral race game to the idea that life is a voyage in which travellers are buffeted between vice and virtue. It was this central Christian allegory that (as its instructions asserted) gave the New Game of Human Life its "UTILITY and MORAL TENDENCY." Parents were advised to play with their children and "request their attention to a few moral and judicious observations explanatory of each Character as they proceed & contrast the happiness of a Virtuous & well spent life with the fatal consequences arriving from Vicious & Immoral pursuits."

The New Game of Human Life showed up in the United States at least as early as 1798 and apparently had a long life here. Had Milton Bradley's long-suffering forebears condoned games (which, as Puritans, they did not), they might have liked the New Game of Human Life. At least they would have recognized its logic: life is a voyage that begins at birth and ends at death, God is at the helm, fate is cruel, and your reward lies beyond the grave.

All of which combine to make it, by our board-game standards, unbearably dull. There's no strategy, just dutiful to-ing and fro-ing, in abject obedience to the Rules of the Game and the spin of the teetotum, a numbered, six-sided top used in place of dice, which many nineteenth-century Americans shunned as immoral. Even worse, there's a disquieting absence of adversaries; you're racing against the other players, but you're not competing against them, the way you are in, say, Monopoly, when you can charge them exorbitant rents. And, as for parents offering up "a few moral and judicious observations" at each square, I have tried this—giving my best impression of an eighteenth-century parent—and all I can say is: no dice. When my six-year-old landed on the Docile Boy, at square 9, I asked him, "Do you know what 'docile' means?"

"No."

"It means you should do what I say, you little blister."

"Yeah, right. Um, your roll."

The next games of life played in the United States, the Mansion of Bliss and the Mansion of Happiness, were both produced in England, beginning around 1800. They look a lot like the New Game of Human Life—spiral race games adapted to the pilgrimage of life—and they're just as awful to play. Both represent immortality, life's final destination, as a heavenly mansion, which was then a popular Christian conceit. "O Lord! Deliver us from sin," one American evangelical prayed in 1814, "and when we shall have finished our earthly course, admit us to the mansion of bliss and happiness."

In the U.S., the Mansion of Bliss never really took off, despite the fact that the phrase "the mansion of bliss" was also used as an admiring term for a woman's breasts. But the Mansion of Happiness had a more successful American career. It was sold in the United States at least as early as 1806. An American edition appeared in 1843, based on revisions to the English game made by Anne Wales Abbott, the editor of a Boston-based juvenile serial called *The Child's Friend and Family Magazine*, and it went on to become one of the century's most popular and enduring games.

The Mansion of Happiness is abundantly pious. The rules begin:

> At this amusement each will find
> A moral fit t'improve the mind;
> It gives to those their proper due,
> Who various paths of vice pursue,
> And shows (while vice destruction brings)
> That GOOD from every virtue springs.
> Be virtuous then and forward press,
> To gain the seat of HAPPINESS.

Whether it's amusing is more difficult to say. The Mansion of Happiness is one of those games which are hard to finish, mostly because the wages of sin are so harsh—"Whoever becomes a SABBATH BREAKER must be taken to the WHIPPING POST and whipt" (a retreat of six squares)—that you're forever going backward and losing turns. However popular the Mansion of Happiness was with the parents who purchased it, many of the game boards that survive in archives are in such suspiciously good condition that at least one historian has wondered whether children—who must, invariably, have been given the game as a gift—could ever bear to play it. After all, its rules read like a sermon: "Whoever possesses AUDACITY, CRUELTY, IMMODESTY, and INGRATITUDE, must return to his former situation till his turn comes to spin again, and not even *think* of Happiness, much less partake of it."

Before he invented the Checkered Game of Life, Milton Bradley had scarcely begun to think of happiness. The only son of an insolvent, itinerant craftsman, he was born in Vienna, Maine, in 1836. When he was about ten, his hapless father, Lewis, invested what little money he had in a process for turning potatoes into starch, just months before the American potato crop was devastated by the same blight that drove hundreds of thousands of Ireland's poor farmers to immigrate to the United States. This, in turn, lowered the wages at factories like the textile mills in Lowell, Massachusetts, where Lewis Bradley was forced to move his family in 1847 to take a job that paid eighty-five cents a day.

While his father worked in the mills, Bradley attended Lowell's grammar school and high school. After graduation, he was admitted to the Lawrence Scientific School, in Cambridge, but he had to drop out when his father left Lowell for Hartford, in search of a better job. By 1856, Bradley had made his way to Springfield, Massachusetts, where he found work as a mechanical draftsman. Four years later, he started a lithography business and brought out an immensely popular election-year lithograph of a clean-shaven Abraham Lincoln. Just when it seemed that the young striver had finally crawled his way to Success, he nearly sank into Ruin: Lincoln grew a beard, making Bradley's inventory worthless.

After he manufactured enough boxes of the Checkered Game of Life to make a sales trip, Bradley travelled to New York, walked into a stationery store, and, his biographers recount, said to the manager, "How do you do, sir. I am Milton Bradley of the Milton Bradley Company of Springfield. I have come to New York with some samples of a new and most amazing game, sir. A highly moral game, may I say, that encourages children to lead exemplary lives and entertains both old and young with the spirit of friendly competition. May I demonstrate how it is played?"

The Checkered Game of Life is deceptively simple. Twirl the teetotum and move your counter around the board, collecting points by landing on any of the eight point-value squares. Whoever earns a hundred points first wins. Some squares help you along, little lithographed hands pointing the way, as when Perseverance leads you to Success, worth five points. Spinning a 2 from the red square between Ruin and Fat Office forces you to land on Suicide and die, but almost any spin from nearly every other square involves a decision, a choice among as many as eight possible moves. Unlike the New Game of Human Life or the Mansion of Happiness, the Checkered Game of Life requires you to make decisions, lots and lots of them. It's best to have a plan.

Most players try to go to School, which allows you to jump to College (worth five points), heading, slowly, toward the top of the board and Happy Old Age, worth a whopping fifty points. But your chances of going to School are not good: from your starting position, at Infancy, you have to spin either a 3 or a 6. You might end up at Poverty instead. But don't despair. "It will be seen that poverty lies near the cradle," Bradley wrote in the Rules of the Game, explaining why he had placed Poverty just two squares from Infancy. But because "in starting life it is not necessarily a fact that poverty will be a disadvantage, so in the game it causes the player no loss." Even if you skip School altogether, you may be rewarded by landing on Honesty, and sent from there directly to Happiness (worth five points).

It's possible to win the Checkered Game of Life without ever reaching Happy Old Age—after all, lots of people die young—but it's not easy. And, as Bradley warned, "Happy Old Age is surrounded by many difficulties": land on Idleness, and you'll be sent to Disgrace, at the very bottom of the board, which means that you have to climb back up all over again. Here's another word of advice: Don't enter Politics, if you can possibly avoid it. You'll go to Congress and earn five points, but you'll be carried away from Happy Old Age and you'll woefully increase your chances of landing on Crime and ending up in Prison, where you lose a turn, "For any person who is sent to prison is interrupted in his pursuit of happiness."

In his application to the U.S. Patent Office, Bradley insisted that his game was "intended to forcibly impress upon the minds of youth the great moral principles of virtue and vice." But the Checkered Game of Life is at least as dark as its predecessors and more ruthless. (It has another distinction, too: it was enjoyed as much by adults as by children). In the Mansion of Happiness, landing on TRUTH—which you can't avoid, if a spin of the teetotum sends you there—advances you six squares; in the Checkered Game of Life, Truth exists, and you can choose to seek it out, but it has no value. Bradley's game rewards Industry and Perseverance with Wealth and Success. It has no use for Patience or Charity, which aren't even on the board. (For a time, the game promoted betting on the stock market, with a square called Speculation.) The Checkered Game of Life isn't a race to heaven; it's a series of calculations about the best route to collect the most points, fastest. Accumulate, or fail.

Milton Bradley sold at least forty thousand copies of his game in its first year, and decided to sell Games for Soldiers, a portable set of games (including the Checkered Game of Life, backgammon, checkers, dominoes, and chess). It found a place in the knapsack of many a Union soldier.

"You could never in a million years sell it today," Mel Taft, a former vice-president of research and development at the Milton Bradley Company, said about Bradley's Checkered Game, when I spoke to him by phone a few months ago. In 1959, when Taft and his colleagues were preparing for the company's centennial, they never seriously considered reviving Bradley's original game. It was so obviously and so dreadfully dated—it even had a square for Intemperance. They decided, instead, to hire a California firm famous for starting the hula-hoop craze to develop a new game of life. I asked both Taft and Reuben Klamer, who was an inventor of the 1960 game, if either of them had ever played the Mansion of Happiness. They hadn't heard of it. But the board game that the Milton Bradley Company released in 1960 as the Game of Life actually looks a good deal like the Mansion of Happiness, just with lots of pieces of plastic attached to it. It's a serpentine race game, a path representing the voyage of life, from high-school graduation to retirement. (In Life, you never die; you just quit working.) There are plenty of differences. In Life, some squares offer rewards ("Contest Winner! Collect $5000!") and others mete out penalties ("Buy Furniture. Pay $2000"), but none are morally freighted; the game lacks any sense of life as a battle between vice and virtue. The object of the two games is different, too: at Life's Day of Reckoning, you count your cash, not your good deeds. And Life's most important squares are its red-letter "PAY DAY!"s.

What you earn on those paydays depends, in large part, on a crucial choice you make on your very first move: will you go to college, or take a job? If you start work, you can collect paychecks right away; if you go to college, you have to pay tuition, but you earn more when you eventually do start getting paychecks. After that, there are occasional financial decisions to be made—do you want to buy life insurance? would you like to invest in the stock market?—but these, and the piles of papers and plastic babies, serve mainly as a distraction from the play's basic passivity. Like the Mansion of Happiness, Life is a journey along a (mostly) fixed path, where only one thing matters. And, like all earlier spiral race games of life, the Game of Life is essentially about fate—not whether you're fated to enter Heaven but whether you're fated to retire to Millionaire Acres. If the Checkered Game of Life brings together choice and chance, the Game of Life has only one real fork in the road: work or study.

Life vaulted over the rest of Milton Bradley's inventory to become the company's flagship game, but it drew criticism, especially as years passed. The game is so relentlessly amoral and cash-conscious that a nineteen-nineties redesign team, eager to make it less so, pretty much gave up. When I visited Hasbro in February, a game designer told me that whenever people tried to make the game less about "having the most money it got really complicated." They did add Life Tiles, which allow players to accomplish things and do good deeds, except that the only way to be rewarded for your virtue is in the game's only currency: cash. Save an Endangered Species: collect $200,000. Solution to Pollution: $250,000. Open Health-Food Chain: $100,000. Recently, some of the old Life Tiles and the board's rewards have been replaced. You used to be able to get $100,000 for winning a Nobel Prize; now you can earn the same money for going on a reality TV show. But it's hard to tinker with success. "With this product there is so much nostalgia, there's only so much we can change," the Hasbro designer Dan Sanfilippo said.

Exactly because the 1960 Game of Life is so hard to change, Hasbro is about to launch its new, new, new game of human life. The Game of Life: Twists & Turns is not a checkerboard of choices; it's not a fixed and fated path. There is, instead, a plethora of paths. The Twists & Turns game board is divided into four squares—Learn It, Live It, Love It, and Earn It—through each of which a colored path snakes its way. Players decide how they want to spend their time—going to school, having kids, hanging out, travelling, *whatever*. You begin using a tiny plastic skateboard as a game piece; if you like, and if you earn enough, you can convert it to a sports car. You can play for five minutes or five hours; you can play till "American Idol" comes on. There are multiple places to begin, each called Start, but there's no place on the board called "Happy Old Age" or "Immortality" or "Millionaire Acres" or even, simply, "Finish." This is actually the game's selling point: it has no goal. Life is . . . aimless. (The game's box shouts, "A THOUSAND WAYS TO LIVE YOUR LIFE! YOU CHOOSE.") When you do decide to stop, whoever ends up with the most Life Points wins, but, heck, winning isn't everything. And, after all, you get as many points for scuba diving in the Great Barrier Reef, or for donating a kidney to a loved one, as for getting a Ph.D.

Money is a big part of the Game of Life: Twists & Turns. But there's no cash. Instead, each player gets a Life-Visa-brand "credit card" to insert in the game's electronic Life Pod, which keeps track of Life Points—earn more, spend more! "We are not marketing to kids," a Visa spokesman, Michael Rolnick, has said, responding to complaints about the Visa-Hasbro deal. "We are helping to educate kids. It's never too early." Hmm. Let's just say that Twists & Turns has a rather forgiving attitude toward the highly leveraged player. "If you're bankrupt in Monopoly, you're watching," a Hasbro Games vice-president, George Burtch, says. "In this game, you can be hugely in debt, but you're still playing!" In the Mansion of Happiness, there's a square for that kind of thing. It's called the Road to Folly.

After Milton Bradley's early success with the Checkered Game of Life, he pursued other interests. In the late eighteen-sixties, he had another big hit with croquet, whose rules he patented and whose equipment manufacture he perfected just as a fever for the game swept the nation, not coincidentally, on the heels of the claim that croquet was . . . just like life. "Croquet is the game of life, you see," says a character in a Harriet Beecher Stowe novel published in 1871, after which another agrees, "One may read all sorts of life-histories in the game. Some go on with a steady aim and true stroke, and make wickets, and hit balls, yet are croqueted back ingloriously or hopelessly wired and lose the game, while others blunder advantageously and are croqueted along by skillful partners into all the best places."

After croquet, though, Milton Bradley dropped the ball. In an era when success made the man—when to fail was to be a failure—Bradley, to some degree, spurned his own achievement. He reached Fat Office, and he left it behind. Far more than most Yankee businessmen of his generation, he came to reject the notion that where you go in life is simply a matter of where you steer yourself. There were such things, in Bradley's mind, as lousy starts, rotten luck, and bad cards. "The journey of life is governed by a combination of chance and judgment," he wrote in 1866. As he grew into his middle years, he apparently came to believe that some people had been given better chances than others. Beginning in the late eighteen-sixties, Bradley devoted himself to the nascent kindergarten movement, a social and political reform as much as an educational one, which insisted that very young children could learn through art and play, a kind of learning that would set them up not only for future academic success but for happiness, too. The push to offer education to four-, five-, and six-year-olds was essentially a nineteenth-century equivalent to Head Start, in which reformers worked to establish free kindergartens for the children of the poor. Enthralled by the movement's philosophy, Bradley turned his energies toward manufacturing crayons, colored paper, color wheels, flash cards, and watercolors. He invented the one-armed paper cutter. In 1869, he entered the publishing business with "The Paradise of Childhood," a lavishly illustrated manual for kindergarten teachers, adapted from the philosophy of the movement's German founder, Friedrich Froebel. Starting in 1893, Bradley published the monthly *Kindergarten News*.

As he aged, Bradley earned a reputation for taking naps in his office; he ordered the presses in his factory stopped for an hour and a half around lunch every day, so as not to disturb him. In 1910, the year before he died, his colleagues presented him with a book of tribute essays titled "Milton Bradley, A Successful Man." But, writing in 1902, Bradley reflected that, of all he had done, he was especially proud of his (often unprofitable) educational inventions: "In using the word success, I do not wish to confine its meaning to that cheap interpretation which sees only the glitter of gold or the glamour of illusive fame. In my case, I cannot overestimate the feeling of satisfaction which has been with me all these years at the thought that I . . . have done something, if only something prosaic in character, to place the kindergarten on its present solid foundation." It was a lesson that a child could have drawn from playing the Checkered Game of Life: Beware of Ambition! It sounds good, but if you land there, you are promptly sent to Fame, a square that not only has no value in itself but also puts you perilously close to Jail, Prison, and Suicide.

When Bradley was a young man, he had written in his Rules, "In starting life, it is not necessarily a fact that poverty will be a disadvantage, so in the game it causes the player no loss." But near the end of his life he seems to have come to believe that he had been wrong. He may even have regretted that he had placed Poverty so close to Infancy, and made the chances of getting to School no better than one in three. The kindergarten movement was about beating those odds, or bettering them. It promised a kind of redemption. Maybe Milton Bradley saw in making crayons for kindergartners not only their second chance but his, too. ♦

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FAULT LINES

Can Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa keep control of L.A.'s battling factions?

BY CONNIE BRUCK

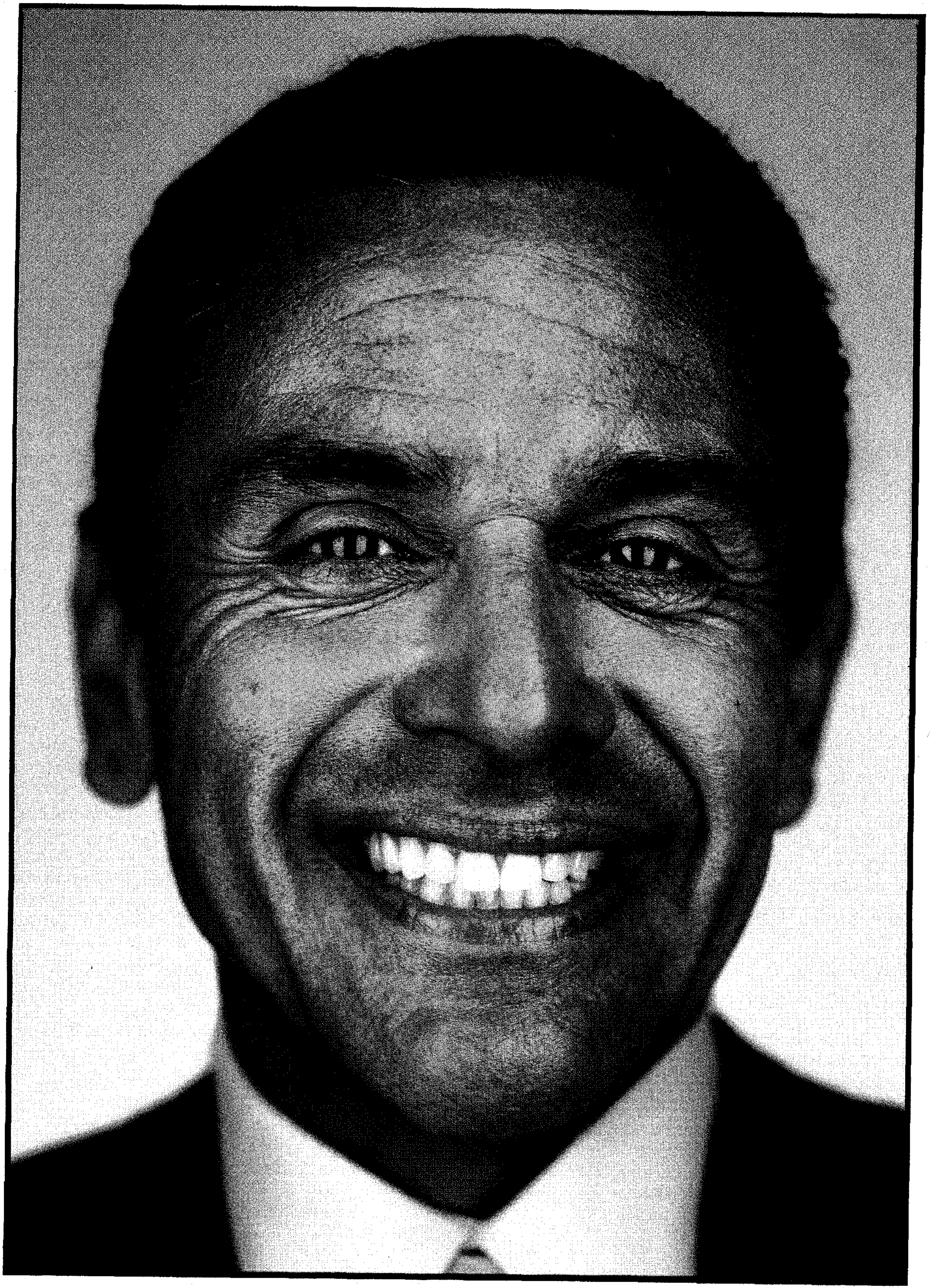
"*Hola! Hola!*" Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa called out as he approached a crowd of boys and girls in MacArthur Park, on the gritty edge of downtown Los Angeles. The children, wearing green, red, and blue soccer shirts, swarmed around him as he asked about their games, tousled their hair. It was Sunday afternoon, May 6th—just five days after a May Day immigrants'-rights rally that had drawn an unexpectedly small crowd, of thirty-five thousand people. Among them were many women pushing babies in strollers, waving American flags and carrying signs that read "Legalización—No Deportación" and "There Are No Borders in the Workers' Struggle." Toward the end of the day, some forty agitators just outside the park began throwing rocks and bottles at the police. According to department protocols, the police should have attempted to isolate these rogue elements. Instead, they pushed them into the larger crowd and then, in full riot gear, moved into the park, hitting people with their batons and firing a hundred and fifty "less than lethal" foam projectiles. Twenty-four protesters and journalists were injured, as were seven police officers. Villaraigosa, the city's first Latino mayor in a hundred and thirty-five years, was away, on a nine-day trip to El Salvador and Mexico intended to increase trade and to promote law-enforcement coöperation in countering the increasing influence of transnational gangs. That evening in El Salvador, he saw videos of the police melee. "Those images hit me in the gut," he said. He recalled one in particular—"of a young boy, maybe twelve years old, hit again, again, and again, trying to run away." He returned three days later, cutting short his trip.

It was a warm spring day, and the park was filled with people playing soccer and picnicking. Several police officers stood on a distant hillside. The chief of police, William Bratton, accompanied the Mayor; he retains Villaraigosa's strong support. Bratton usually seems to enjoy being the center of attention, but that Sunday, dressed in civilian clothing and looking fatigued, he appeared satisfied to be part of the retinue, as Villaraigosa, surrounded by a growing throng of children, walked slowly through the park. Wherever he went, people called out, "*Gracias, Villaraigosa!*" He paused periodically to say something to them, speaking in Spanish and occasionally translating for reporters: "We recognize your right to be here with your family and play, and your right to march here and speak out against the government—whether you are here legally or illegally. We will stand up for your rights. That is the American dream." With a nod toward Bratton, he promised that there would be a full investigation, and "consequences for the abuse." To a crowd of children, he said, "You speak English and Spanish both?" Most said yes. "That's very important, to be bilingual," he told them. "It would be great if you could learn a third language. It's so important for you to stay in school. How many of you are from El Salvador?" About a dozen hands went up. ("I'm from Mexico!" yelled a boy who was wearing the green soccer shirt of the "Mexico" team.) "We need to make sure we work on this issue of gangs," Villaraigosa said. "That's what I was doing in El Salvador. You want to stay in school, stay out of gangs, take care of your mommy and daddy."

He stopped by a picnic table. A woman named María Sanchez had brought food for her extended family of twenty, and she offered him a tostada. Villaraigosa had just had lunch, but he ate it with gusto, and praised the cook. He asked for a tostada for Bratton, who was standing nearby. Then he hugged Sanchez and kissed her on the cheek. People took pictures of him with their cell phones, and gave him scraps of paper to autograph. Some children asked him to sign their soccer shirts. Soon he was autographing soccer shoes, sun visors, dollar bills. A man held out a bill. "*Veinte?*" Villaraigosa said, shaking his head with a smile, but he signed it, too.

Villaraigosa had been tirelessly traversing the city ever since his return, reassuring the public that order would prevail, and repeatedly declaring, "We are one L.A." He insists that the city's extraordinary cultural diversity is its greatest strength. On Saturday, he had gone to two Cinco de Mayo festivals, one of them in Watts, a formerly African-American community that is now sixty per cent Latino. That evening, he attended Mass, where he spoke, in Spanish, about the events of May 1st. On Sunday morning, before his visit to MacArthur Park, he had delivered remarks at the end of Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. The church was completed five years ago, and its huge nave, which seats nearly four thousand people, was filled with Latino, Anglo, Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, and African-American worshippers. Villaraigosa stood in front of a series of tapestries depicting the City of God superimposed on the City of Angels. "I come today with a heavy heart," he said. "We must pray for peace, but we understand there is no peace without justice. . . . There are many who have forgotten how they got here and seek to demonize the immigrants among us. I ask Angelenos to come together—now is not a time to point fingers but to come together." After the service, a long line of congregants formed, waiting for a chance to speak to the Mayor. He kissed babies, posed for pictures, and hugged people. Two elderly nuns told him that they were praying for him. He broke away only when one of his aides whispered that Cardinal Roger Michael Mahony, with whom he was to hold a brief press conference, was growing impatient.

Villaraigosa likes to say that Los Angeles will soon be the world's most important city—a proving ground for a multicultural society, a place where well over a hundred languages are spoken within four



The Mayor's talent for connecting with people is a boon, but he has alienated some old supporters. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

"Friends don't let friends turn state's evidence."

hundred and sixty-nine square miles, where there are many ethnic communities that are the largest outside their native countries. But his vision of this international city of the future was undercut by the events of May 1st, when the L.A.P.D.—supposedly a new L.A.P.D., reformed and revitalized by Chief Bratton—acted in a manner that recalled infamously brutal moments of the past: in 1967, L.A.P.D. officers beat anti-Vietnam War demonstrators outside the Century Plaza Hotel; in 1991, they beat Rodney King, an unarmed African-American; in 2000, they beat demonstrators and reporters at the Democratic National Convention. The abuses in 2000 had led to the protocols that were ignored in MacArthur Park.

The images of police firing into crowds of immigrants also underscored the volatility and the fragility of the diverse city that Villaraigosa celebrates. In the past decade or so, there has been a sharp rise in violence between Latinos and African-Americans; much of it is gang-related, emanating from the prisons. While Latinos have entered Los Angeles in growing numbers—between 1980 and 2000 their share of the city's population rose from twenty-seven per cent to forty-seven per cent, and will be more than fifty per cent by 2010—the proportion of African-Americans has declined. By 2000, African-Americans accounted for only eleven per cent of the population; schools that were once largely African-American are now predominantly Latino. There have been a number of highly publicized hate crimes against blacks, and some black students feel so threatened that they walk in groups when they leave school in the afternoon.

Sometimes the Mayor seems to think that he can wrest the ideal city into existence through sheer kinetic energy. In the Villaraigosa administration, governing looks a lot like campaigning. The Mayor spends a great deal of time away from his office, appearing at half a dozen events most days, and holding multiple press conferences, in both English and Spanish. In times of crisis, his talent for connecting with people is a boon, but at other times it can appear contrived—as when, not long ago, he stepped into a busy major thoroughfare and started knocking on car windows, trying to hand out flyers to startled drivers. At a press conference recently, he noted that there were only five television cameras, and said, irritably, "We had sixteen cameras at the last event!" At a Greek festival, a woman approached Villaraigosa and exclaimed, "You work so hard! How do you do it?" He took her hands in his and replied, "Do you know what's happening? Your energy is flowing through me!"

The pleasure that Villaraigosa derives from contact with people calls to mind Bill Clinton—an impression that Villaraigosa cultivates. In one of several conversations we had, he mentioned a column about him by George Skelton in the Los Angeles *Times*, in 2001. Skelton wrote, "Working a room, Villaraigosa is in a league with President Bush and Bill Clinton." Just before the mayoral election in 2005, Villaraigosa called his friend and supporter Nick Patsaouras to talk about the opposition's tactics. Patsaouras recalled, "Antonio told me, 'They're going to hit us with everything they have. But I see where I'm going. They are not going to get me. I am like Clinton!' "

Villaraigosa became the Speaker of the California State Assembly in 1998, after just three and a half years as an assemblyman; he ran for mayor in 2001 and lost, but in 2003 he won a seat on the City Council and, two years later, the mayoralty. Because of the increasing number and importance of Latino voters nationally, Villaraigosa has assumed a position of prominence in the Democratic Party. He endorsed John Kerry early in the 2004 Presidential campaign and became co-chair of Kerry's national campaign. He spoke at the Democratic-caucus retreats of both the House and the Senate in early 2006, and, last January, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi invited him to Washington to attend the State of the Union address, seating him beside her husband in the gallery. During that trip, he had dinner with Senator Hillary Clinton; afterward, he told a friend that he was pleased by how much she knew about him.

California's Presidential primary has been moved up to February 5th (only Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Florida, and Nevada will hold their primaries earlier), and, because the state offers the largest number of delegates, candidates are paying more attention than ever to California politicians. Although Villaraigosa has been mentioned as a possible Vice-Presidential candidate in 2008, he is focussed on the race for governor in 2010. He is likely to be a formidable candidate; other Democrats who might do well in Los Angeles and San Francisco could face trouble in the center of the state, but there are a great many Latino voters in the small towns of the Central Valley, and Villaraigosa has ties to agribusinesses there, from his days as Speaker. "The table is set," a friend remarked.

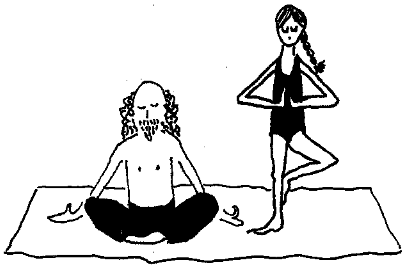
In recent months, though, Villaraigosa has had difficulties with the City Council, other political leaders, and the business community, and has come to appear less invincible. His broad coalition has begun to fray, and strains have emerged between him and the African-American community, which was crucial to his election. In December, a court ruling stymied his efforts at school reform, and that ruling was upheld on appeal in mid-April. That same month, Los Angeles lost to Chicago in the competition to be the U.S. candidate for host of the 2016 Olympics. After the announcement, a photograph in the Los Angeles *Times* showed the perpetually smiling Mayor looking slack-jawed and stricken. And in early May the courts handed him another political defeat. In the past year, the Mayor and the City Council have approved two laws extending the city's "living wage" protections to workers who had previously not had them. A Superior Court judge blocked the more recent law and accused the city's political leaders of "bad faith" for not putting the issue before the voters in a public referendum. This time, the Mayor had company in defeat, but, as one local politician said, "it was Villaraigosa's deal."

And although his efforts to reassure the public after the violence in MacArthur Park have been praised, many public officials believe that Villaraigosa should have returned to Los Angeles more quickly. Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, a close political ally, called him on Wednesday, May 2nd, and told him to come back immediately. But he waited two more days.

It was surely not coincidental that Villaraigosa scheduled a trip that took him away on the day of the rally. The year before, his conduct during the huge immigrants'-rights demonstrations in March had been damaging to him politically. He had ignored advisers' warnings not to associate himself with the protest, one of the largest demonstrations in the city's history. Standing on a balustrade outside City Hall, he addressed some five hundred thousand protesters. "There are no illegal people here today," he told the crowd. "America was built on the backs of immigrants." Until that moment, Villaraigosa told me, "I had ninety-four per cent approval among Latinos, ninety-two per cent among Democrats, eighty-seven per cent among African-Americans, and seventy-four per cent among Republicans. I dropped thirty-six per cent among Republicans, and double digits among Democrats, African-Americans, and Latinos, though a lot of the numbers have come back up." Not all Latinos, he explained, are in favor of immigrants' rights. Villaraigosa says that his position on immigration is hardly radical—he supports the McCain-Kennedy bill, which would strengthen border security while providing additional temporary work visas for immigrants who enter legally—but he feels that on this issue the public holds him to a different standard than it does non-Latino politicians.

That has long been Villaraigosa's central dilemma. Being Latino obviously accounts for a large part of his appeal and his political success, but the subject of immigration is one of the country's most polarizing issues, and if he appears "too Latino" he risks losing support among all his constituent groups. When he spoke at the National Press Club, in January, he was annoyed that many questions concerned immigration. He now seems to avoid the subject when he can.

But Villaraigosa's recent troubles may stem less from the Latino dilemma than from his own shortcomings. His single-minded ambition contains a streak of petty vindictiveness, and he has alienated many who were once enthusiastic supporters. Even among other politicians—not a shy group—his drive for self-aggrandizement sets him apart; and some of his colleagues say that he cannot be trusted in the normal give-and-take of political life. "He wants you when he needs you, and then it's over," a legislator who has known him for many years told me. There are officials who deeply dislike him but hesitate to cross him. (One who did was banned from his office, and, at a press conference, Villaraigosa introduced everyone on the dais but that official.)



When Nancy Pelosi praised him during a meeting of the California House Democratic delegation in January, Dennis Cardoza, a congressman from the Central Valley who served in the California Assembly with him, told her that she did not know the real Villaraigosa, who "stabs people in the back."

Tom Hayden, the former activist, also served in the California legislature with Villaraigosa, and has known him for nearly twenty years. "Antonio's pattern is to leave people in the dust," Hayden told me. He pointed to Villaraigosa's treatment of Phil Angelides, the Democratic candidate for California governor last year, in his race against Arnold Schwarzenegger. Villaraigosa waited to endorse Angelides until several months after other Democratic officeholders had; he appeared publicly with Schwarzenegger, on one occasion in support of the Governor's bond proposals for infrastructure funding; and during the critical days of the campaign he went to Asia. Villaraigosa benefitted significantly when Schwarzenegger won a second term: the governor's seat will be open in 2010. According to Hayden, Villaraigosa might as well have said, "'Look what I'm doing! I'm squashing Phil, and I got state bonds and an open run for governor.'" He continued, "You don't do that. The people he leaves behind and the damage to relationships may come back like karma."

Few major American politicians have a more dramatic story of transformation. Villaraigosa began incorporating his story into speeches when he first ran for office, in 1994. He tells audiences he was so poor that he put cardboard in his shoes to cover their holes and, when he was seven, hawked the Spanish-language daily *La Opinión* in front of Grand Olympic Auditorium. His family lived in a small house in the City Terrace section of East L.A., and he says that sometimes his father, a Mexican-immigrant welder who was an alcoholic, beat his mother "to a bloody pulp." His father left the family in 1958, when Antonio was five, soon remarried, and had another son, whom he named Anthony. It was as if he were erasing his first son, Antonio, who was called Tony. Villaraigosa's mother, Natalia Delgado, worked for twenty years as a secretary at a large state agency; she died in 1991. He adored her, and frequently refers to her as "a single mom who raised four kids." A few years after his father left his mother—when Antonio was nine—she remarried, and two years later gave birth to a baby boy.

When Tony was fifteen, he suddenly became paralyzed from the waist down, and underwent surgery for a tumor in his spinal canal. After his recovery, he started getting into fights, and his grades dropped. He also participated in the Chicano Blowouts of 1968, in which thousands of students in East L.A. walked out of school to protest the fact that Mexican-Americans were receiving an inferior education. (But he was ecumenical: he also helped found a black student union.) He was expelled from Cathedral High School, a small Catholic boys' school, where he had been taking college-prep courses, and went to Roosevelt High, a huge school, with thousands of students, where he was placed on a vocational track. He dropped out in eleventh grade, cruised Whittier Boulevard in a 1965 Chevrolet Malibu, and got tattoos ("Born to Raise Hell"). When his mother saw the bandages on his arms, she wept, fearful that she was losing him to a life of violence. But, he declares, she never stopped believing in him, and an English teacher named Herman Katz encouraged him to return to school and go on to college.

Villaraigosa told this story in a speech that he delivered to the Democratic caucus in the Assembly in Sacramento, just after he had been voted Speaker. "There were a lot of people crying," he recalled. "And I wasn't, for some reason, but I was really emotional. Then the most beautiful thing happened—somebody said, 'Let's pray.' And all of us got each other's hands, and we prayed. It was a very powerful thing."

Gilbert Cedillo met Villaraigosa at Roosevelt High, and they became close friends. (Villaraigosa was Tony Villar then; he began using "Antonio" in the eighties, and he created a blended name when he married Corina Raigosa, a schoolteacher, in 1987.) "He's really quick," Cedillo says. "He talks quickly, moves quickly, doesn't ponder—or, if he does, he does it quickly." Through an Upward Bound program, Cedillo was accepted at U.C.L.A.; Villaraigosa went to East Los Angeles College and then transferred to U.C.L.A., where he ended up living in Cedillo's apartment ("Rent-free," Cedillo joked). They both became active in Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, a campus Chicano-rights group. And both attended the Peoples College of Law, a night school dedicated to producing public-interest lawyers. (Villaraigosa took the bar exam four times, but never passed.) Villaraigosa visited Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade, a radical group. And he and Cedillo became deeply involved in Centros de Acción Social Autónomo, or CASA, an immigrant's-rights organization led by the Mexican-American labor activist Bert Corona, and worked on its newspaper, *Sín Fronteras*. "At CASA, we wanted to organize the undocumented into unions, instead of seeing them as a threat," Cedillo said.

Like many other highly ambitious people, Villaraigosa presents his tenacious ascent as a kind of accidental journey. Recently, however, addressing a class on leadership at the University of Southern California, he mentioned that he practices self-actualization, which he learned from his mother: you visualize yourself somewhere, and then you see yourself methodically doing the things that it takes to get there. "I do this a lot," he told the class. "If you see me spacing out, that's what I'm doing." Later, he told me that he has been engaging in this discipline since he was in his twenties, and that he used it to chart his course to the mayoralty.

In 1978, Villaraigosa began working for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, as an investigator in employment-discrimination cases. "A group of women filed a grievance saying they were being discriminated against, and pointed to me as the person who was getting the benefits," Villaraigosa recalled. "We had a woman supervisor at the time, and they said she was favoring me"—he smiled broadly—"and they asked me to testify on their behalf, and I agreed to do that even though I was the one who was supposedly benefitting." Villaraigosa argued the women's case in the grievance hearing—"and of course I go from being the fair-haired child to being in the outhouse," he said. "So it started getting around the office that I was really good at representing people." Shortly afterward, he was elected president of a local union representing civil-rights workers, lawyers, and others in six states. He was twenty-five.

Over the next fifteen years, Villaraigosa continued to work as a union organizer, first at the Service Employees International Union and then at United Teachers Los Angeles. He attended workshops at an organization founded by Saul Alinsky, the community organizer whose theories also drew close attention from Hillary Clinton (in her college thesis) and Barack Obama. Villaraigosa's union experience was valuable preparation for his political career, his lifelong friend Jesús Quiñonez pointed out, "because as a labor organizer you have to know how to build coalitions and organize a majority." It was this, rather than the militancy sometimes associated with union leaders, that Villaraigosa assimilated.

"Antonio's strongest ideological commitment is to get everybody in the room and work it out," a political consultant who knows him well says. In 1988, Villaraigosa broadened his network by joining the union board of the local branch of the A.C.L.U., many of whose members came from the city's heavily Jewish Westside. Ramona Ripston, the organization's executive director, recalled that, three years after joining the board, Villaraigosa told her he wanted to run for president. "Up until then—and since then—people who were elected president had served on the board for long periods of time," she said. Nevertheless, he was elected. "And then, after one year as president, he was gone!" Villaraigosa resigned from the A.C.L.U. presidency in 1994, to run for the State Assembly. Darryl Holter, who knew him in the labor movement, recalls, "I remember people saying—'Oh, is he running? He's a good guy, but I don't think he's ready for it.' With Antonio, at every step of the way, people think, Is he overreaching?" Holter added, "Because of what his life has been—constantly exceeding others' expectations—he may not know his limits."

At the time, Latinos were beginning to transform California politics. Two years earlier, State Assemblyman Richard Polanco had decided to try to increase the number of Latino state legislators. There were only a handful among the state's hundred and twenty, so Polanco recruited several candidates (one was in line for unemployment benefits when he reached her on her cell phone) and helped fund their campaigns. Nearly all won. Then Polanco backed Latino "crossover" candidates as well—that is, Latinos running for seats that were not clearly Latino—and many of them won, too. Today, there are twenty-six Latinos in the legislature.

Villaraigosa was not part of Polanco's design. Perhaps because the Latino political turf had been constricted for so long, it was marked by bitter infighting. "We have a propensity, like other minorities, to screw one another," Richard Alatorre, a veteran Latino politician and a Villaraigosa adviser, says. In the early nineties, Polanco led the most powerful camp. The second most powerful was led by Gloria Molina, who had challenged the male-dominated Latino political establishment and beaten Polanco in a race for the Assembly in 1982. Tony Castro, then a reporter for the Los Angeles *Herald Examiner*, referred to Polanco, Alatorre, and other male power brokers on the city's Eastside as the Golden Palominos, and the name stuck. Later, some referred to Molina's cadre, which included Villaraigosa, as the Macho Dogs. Villaraigosa was a close friend of Molina's husband, Ron Martinez, and he had been best man at their wedding. When Villaraigosa entered the Democratic primary for the Assembly seat in 1994, Molina was one of his most ardent backers, raising money for him and campaigning door to door, but most of the Latino political establishment backed Polanco's candidate.

From the start, Villaraigosa extended his campaign beyond East L.A. He had help from Westside liberals he had met through the A.C.L.U.; the city's progressives were solidly behind him; and he had strong support from labor. Gil Cedillo, who was then the head of Local 660 of the Service Employees International Union, said, "We gave Antonio a big check up front, which made him credible. I assigned a staff of twenty-five people every weekend to walk the district. And we gave him two full-time staffers and a computer system."

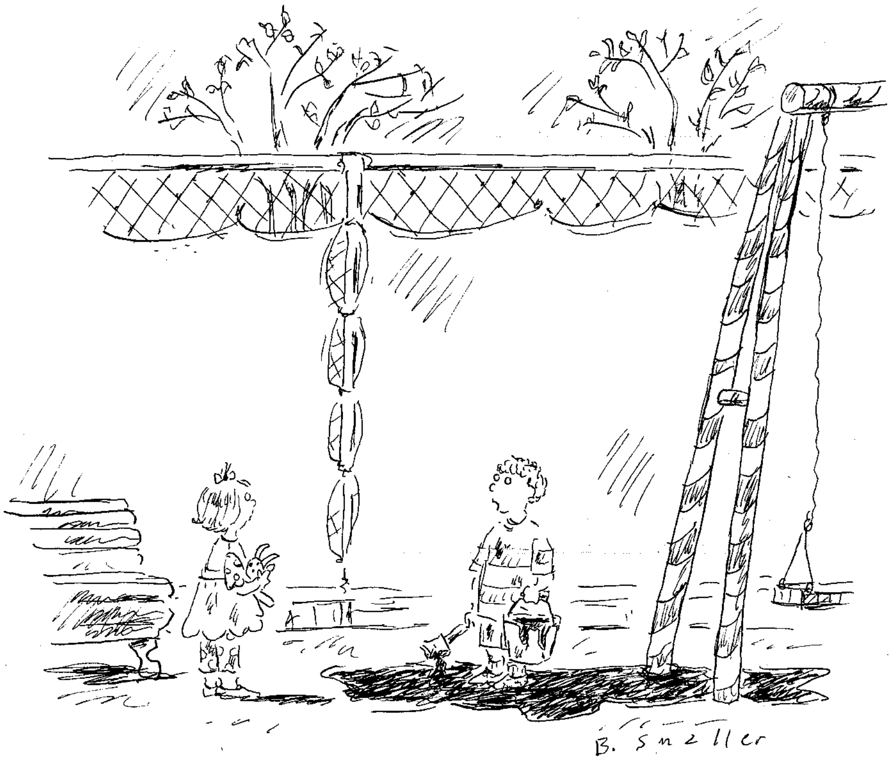
"Most people didn't think I could win, but I believed I could," Villaraigosa said. "And I remember them telling me early on that I should concentrate on the Latino community, and I said, 'Why? I'm going for every community!' I've never been an ethnic. I believed my strength was that I would be a coalition builder. And, while I won biggest in the Latino areas of the district, I won in almost every area." On the night of the primary election, Villaraigosa held a victory party at the Plaza de la Raza, a Latino cultural center. Xavier Becerra, a congressman from Los Angeles, gave a speech praising the courage of Antonio and his wife, Corina, who had been battling thyroid cancer throughout the campaign.

The next morning, Corina phoned friends, asking if they had any idea where Antonio was. She learned that he had left town for a few days with the wife of one of their close friends.

Villaraigosa's supporters were outraged. The Macho Dogs held a meeting; some wanted their money back, and there was talk of recalling him. Many were appalled at his recklessness. He had run as a family man, sending out pictures of himself with Corina and their two small children. (He also has two older daughters, whom he helps support, from relationships before he was married.) Initially, Villaraigosa defended his actions, saying, "It is a matter of the heart." He eventually acknowledged his error. That did not help much with many people, including his wife, who remained estranged from him for two and a half years. "He was a pariah," Cedillo told me.

Perhaps no supporter was more upset than Gloria Molina. "It was a mix of anger and unbelievable disappointment, because we had worked so hard," she said. And she felt that Villaraigosa had betrayed a public as well as a private trust. "I so value these positions," Molina, who is now a county supervisor, said. "There are very few of us who have the opportunity to represent these people, and there just has to be a respect for the role you're undertaking."

When Villaraigosa arrived in Sacramento, he largely ignored the chilly welcome he got from members of the Latino caucus and set about making other friends. "I was the one all the advocacy groups came to, because I am a believer," he said. "The women's caucus came to me and said they wanted to do a breast-feeding bill. And I said, 'Why me?' And they said they thought it was very important for a man to carry the bill." The bill established that women had the right to breast-feed in public. Villaraigosa's colleagues ribbed him. "Oh, I took abuse! I'll never forget some of the sexist things the guys would say to me. But I just took that issue on, man. I mean, nobody wanted it, and if you do a Nexis search you'll see—I was in the papers and on TV all the time!" A member of the Sacramento political élite recalls that, at his first meeting with Villaraigosa, after they had talked for a



"It's not icky—it's tactile."

while Villaraigosa said, “You and I are meant to be. The minute I met you, I felt this special connection to you.”

Villaraigosa gravitated to the powerful Speaker of the Assembly, Willie Brown, who had held the office for nearly fifteen years. Brown was a flamboyant figure, with a closet full of Brioni suits and fedoras, and a gourmand’s taste for food and wine, but he had a serious talent for leveraging his power, and he managed his members with finesse. Polanco was one of his lieutenants. Officially, Brown had taken no side in Villaraigosa’s primary race. As Villaraigosa explained it to me, “Willie didn’t endorse against me, but he closed out Sacramento; I couldn’t raise much money. So when it was over he called me and said, ‘I want to congratulate you.’ I said, ‘I want to thank you.’ He said, ‘For what?’ I said, ‘For not getting involved in my race.’ And he got quiet—because we both knew he was. And then he said, ‘Well, I would like to think if I had gotten involved I wouldn’t be here congratulating you right now.’ And I said, ‘Mr. Brown, I have no doubt about that.’ But he’s the Speaker. Kiss and make up!”

When Brown’s chief of staff asked him to fill out a request for committee assignments, Villaraigosa continued, “I said, ‘Just put me where the Speaker wants. I’m a team player.’ I never asked to be appointed to the leadership, but he made me whip.

“I didn’t talk for six months in caucus—I just listened,” Villaraigosa said. “I spent more time at the beginning with the senior members because I wanted to learn. So I’d go to dinner with them and listen to their stories, and I watched Willie all the time and I saw how he led.”

But it was John Hein, not Willie Brown, who played the most important role in Villaraigosa’s political education. Hein—an imposing, big-framed former college basketball player—was the head of government relations for the powerful California Teachers Association. A keen strategist, Hein was so dedicated to the arcana of polling that he gained a reputation in political circles as the man who knew everything. He had met Villaraigosa when he was an organizer for the local teachers’ union in L.A.; now Hein took an interest in the freshman legislator, and Villaraigosa reciprocated. In 1990, a California ballot initiative had imposed stringent term limits on state legislators, limiting members to six years in the Assembly and eight in the Senate. As a result, even freshmen were trying to position themselves to become Speaker. Villaraigosa was among them, and Hein counselled him, stressing the importance of raising money and directing him to organizations that would contribute. Legislators could choose to keep the money they raised in their own account or place it in a communal pot, to be distributed by the Speaker to election campaigns. Most of the Democratic leaders were wary of this arrangement, because if they failed to become Speaker they would lose control of their money. Hein told Villaraigosa to put the money in the pot, and he did. “Others did that later, but he did it first, and it elevated him,” Hein said.

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“Whatever you do, give the bellboy a good tip.”

In 1996, Cruz Bustamante (backed by Richard Polanco) was elected Speaker—the first Latino to hold the position—and Villaraigosa became majority leader. About a year later, Bustamante decided that he wanted to run for lieutenant governor in the 1998 election, and immediately the jockeying to succeed him began. But Villaraigosa was in the best position, and he had the skilled assistance of Bob Hertzberg. Villaraigosa and Hertzberg—bearish, bespectacled, Jewish, eccentric (he hugs virtually everyone who crosses his path)—had been an odd couple for years. Hertzberg was the treasurer of Villaraigosa’s 1994 campaign, and in 1996 he won an Assembly seat himself; he and Villaraigosa roomed together in Sacramento. “Bob Hertzberg was the organizational force behind Antonio’s campaign for Speaker,” Parke Skelton, a Villaraigosa political adviser, says. “Bob is a detail guy, strong on administration. Antonio’s a vision guy. They made a good team.” After Villaraigosa was elected, he pushed out Cruz Bustamante, even though Bustamante had been a generous ally and they had made a private deal that the official handover would not take place for several months. “Antonio reneged,” Polanco says.

During his tenure as Speaker, Villaraigosa oversaw legislation involving health care for the poor, consumer rights, and bonds for parks, education, and the environment. “He was a truly progressive Speaker,” Martha Escutia, a former member of the Assembly who was elected in 1992 with Polanco’s help, says. Villaraigosa took up legislation that she had worked on to provide health coverage for children in low-income families, put his name on it, and got it passed. He also supported a two-billion-dollar environmental-restoration bond proposed by Tom Hayden in the state senate. “Antonio took it and named it the Villaraigosa bill, got credit for the whole thing, and ran for mayor on it," Hayden told me.

Also as speaker, Villaraigosa acquired new friends who happened to be billionaires: Ronald Burkle, the supermarket magnate; Roland Arnall, the founder of Ameriquest, one of the biggest subprime lenders in the country (which recently agreed to pay $325 million to settle accusations of predatory lending practices); and Eli Broad, a leading Los Angeles philanthropist in the fields of education, scientific research, and the arts. He also formed a close friendship with Keith Brackpool, a British-born businessman, who had previously pleaded guilty to securities fraud in England, and who was promoting a California water-storage scheme that could have brought him hundreds of millions of dollars if the state had approved it. With these companions, Villaraigosa travelled on private jets and developed a taste for expensive wine. (When he summoned the sommelier at a restaurant recently, a friend joked, "Antonio, I knew you when you drank Manischewitz!") According to one legislator (though Villaraigosa denies it), he even began getting out of his car "in an almost regal way," extending his arms while waiting for his driver, a highway-patrol officer, to help him into his jacket.

About two years after Villaraigosa became Speaker, he began preparing for the 2001 mayoral race. His advisers thought that it was a difficult gamble, but he believed he could emulate Willie Brown, who had become mayor of San Francisco. Like his predecessor Cruz Bustamante, Villaraigosa wanted to retain his Speaker's title as long as possible, using the position to raise money while he was campaigning, but Hertzberg, who was in line for the job, wanted him to go. At one point, Villaraigosa is said to have threatened Hertzberg if he did not get his way. The two finally reached a compromise—Villaraigosa would become Speaker Emeritus—but their partnership was finished.

In the mayoral race, Villaraigosa suffered a crushing loss to James Hahn, a laconic city attorney whose father, a longtime county supervisor, was beloved in the African-American community. Nevertheless, he often says that it was the campaign he enjoyed most. "Straight from the Heart of L.A." was his slogan. "We wanted it to say a number of things," Villaraigosa told me. "That I'm from L.A., I live in the center of the city, and I'm a leader who has heart." He explained, "In criticizing the Democrats from time to time, I've said that the Republicans have beaten Democrats because they speak to America's heart, and we speak to her head."

Recalling the contest with Hahn, Villaraigosa told me, "Everybody would say, 'He's got way more detail than you, you've got to have more detail!' And I said, 'I don't believe that's why people vote. They vote on who you are. So I want them to see who I am, as a person.' "

Many Villaraigosa supporters also recall that campaign fondly. "It had been a long time since there was such excitement about a candidate in Los Angeles," Sheila Kuehl, a state senator from Los Angeles who served in the Assembly with Villaraigosa, says. Kuehl, a lesbian, appreciated Villaraigosa's support for gay rights, but his appeal was much broader than any single issue. "There was such hope about Antonio," she says. "He's someone who cares about all the classes, rich and poor." When Villaraigosa campaigned, workers at union meetings stood on their chairs and shouted, and immigrant voters were galvanized. In 1986, Ronald Reagan declared amnesty for 2.7 million illegal immigrants, and there was a dramatic increase in the number of new Latino citizens. Many of the new citizens lived in Los Angeles, and Miguel Contreras, the formidable secretary treasurer of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor and a Villaraigosa backer, helped organize large-scale get-out-the-vote campaigns.

In the closing days of the race, the Hahn campaign ran a television ad that attacked Villaraigosa for asking President Clinton to reconsider the case of a convicted Latino drug trafficker who was the son of a major Villaraigosa contributor. Showing a grainy image of a man smoking a crack pipe, the ad seemed designed to inflame racial fears. The Hahn campaign also raised the issue of a misdemeanor assault charge that had been lodged against Villaraigosa in 1977, after a fight in a restaurant. He has said that he was defending his mother, and the charges were dropped, but the campaign wanted to remind people that he'd been an angry Latino street tough. In the end, Villaraigosa was defeated by seven percentage points, and he got only twenty per cent of the black vote. Jesús Quiñonez says that although the ad was damaging, "the truth was, he hadn't built enough support in the black community, or in the Valley"—a more conservative and Republican area. "He didn't have the coalition he needed."

After Villaraigosa's defeat, the friends he had courted when he was Speaker—Ronald Burkle, Roland Arnall, and Keith Brackpool—provided him with a temporary berth; each is said to have been paying him a consultant's fee of about ten thousand dollars a month. Villaraigosa considered running for a state-senate seat—the same one that Gil Cedillo, his friend of more than thirty years, was hoping to win. Cedillo implored him not to. A close adviser of Villaraigosa's warned him, "There is a perception that you are not loyal. This will only reinforce it." In the end, Villaraigosa decided not to enter the race. (He told a friend that he thought he ought to remain in L.A. and try to focus on his marriage, which had suffered as a result of his life in Sacramento.) Nevertheless, the episode ended his friendship with Cedillo.

In 2003, Villaraigosa successfully ran for the City Council. During the campaign, he promised that he would not seek the mayoralty again in 2005, but a year later he reconsidered. As mayor, Hahn took strong steps to try to improve the L.A.P.D. They included firing the police chief and bringing in Bratton. He also fought off a move for secession by the Valley. But Hahn was so nondescript that even his big accomplishments tended to be overlooked, and his administration was plagued by allegations of corruption. Villaraigosa loves to tell the story of assembling his consultants and closest supporters—fifteen in all—to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of his entering the race. One by one, they voted, he says. No one thought that he should do it. "They all felt that, when I ran, I would be the next mayor of the city, but that I should wait. And I listened, and I said, 'I know the evidence says I can't win this race, but my gut says I can. So I'm running.' And everybody looked at me—they thought it was, like, daunting!' "

He ran a very different race this time,

going out of his way to show that he intended to be the mayor of all Los Angeles. "Latinos have an advantage over African-Americans with white voters," a local political consultant told me. "Because of having screwed over African-Americans for hundreds of years, whites have a primeval fear of letting them come to power. But Latinos are very much like our grandparents and great-grandparents, coming to this country for jobs—so, ultimately, they're not so scary. But the way you make it scary is if you say Latinos are taking control." Keeping the idea of rising Latino power in check was difficult for the Villaraigosa people. "Every day during the campaign, his base would be saying, 'Why aren't we doing this event in East L.A.?'"

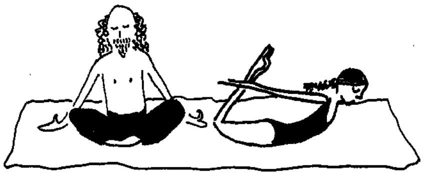
Representative Maxine Waters, a sharp-tongued, deft power broker, had endorsed Hahn in 2001. But Hahn had failed to pay attention to Waters, and many African-Americans were angry with him for firing the police chief, who was black. "Antonio started going to churches in South L.A., doing events with Maxine—and he did great outreach during the campaign," Ari Swiller, a former campaign aide to Bill Clinton, told me. Swiller later worked for Ronald Burkle, and raised considerable money for Villaraigosa. Endorsements matter a great deal in the black community, and Villaraigosa secured quite a few, including Maxine Waters's and Magic Johnson's.

On May 17, 2005, Villaraigosa won a landslide victory, with forty-eight per cent of the African-American vote, and even support from Republicans in the Valley. Shortly afterward, he appeared on the cover of *Newsweek*, with the headline "A LATIN POWER SURGE." "Antonio was upset," Villaraigosa's friend Richard Katz said. "To have that headline, after he'd worked so hard to run a campaign saying he is Latino but would be the mayor of all of L.A. But if it weren't for Latino power he wouldn't have been on the cover of *Newsweek*. So it cuts both ways."

On July 1, 2005, Villaraigosa and his wife led a long procession through the streets of downtown Los Angeles to the steps of City Hall. In his inaugural address—before an audience that included Willie Brown, Al Gore, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and Governor Schwarzenegger—Villaraigosa declared that he would never forget where he came from. ("It may be a short way from City Terrace to City Hall, but, fellow-Angelenos, we all know what a vast distance it truly is.") He talked about his mother, and said that stories like hers were everywhere. "We see them in the faces of people who clean homes and offices. Who work the night shifts and who empty bed pans. We see them in the faces of people who sweep the floors and load the freight. . . . Even though we live in the entertainment capital of the world, it's not hard to see who the real stars are." There was a prevalent sense that a Latino mayor was long overdue, and Villaraigosa's excitement about the city was a tonic for many Angelenos.

In contrast to the mayors of cities like New York and Chicago, the mayor of Los Angeles has little structural power. But Villaraigosa set grand, and sometimes grandiose, goals. Building a subway to the sea. Planting a million trees across the city and reducing air pollution at the huge port. Fighting crime. Alleviating traffic congestion. Paving roads. Achieving twenty-per-cent reliance on renewable energy by 2010. (When I asked a Villaraigosa adviser how the Mayor had decided upon this energy goal, he explained, "The state said it would achieve twenty per cent by 2017, so he said, 'We'll do it by 2010!' It's very ambitious. Moving the Department of Water and Power is like moving the Titanic.") Villaraigosa appointed new people—many of whom were very talented—to government jobs, and assigned these issues to them. But he wanted a signature initiative, and he decided to seek mayoral control of the public-school system, the second-largest in the country. Explaining his mission to friends, he has said, "When I look at these kids, I see myself."

Villaraigosa's self-image retains vestiges of his tough youth—an audacious risk-taker, cool and unflinching, who punishes his enemies and meets the biggest challenge. In Los Angeles, education was that challenge. Proposition 13, the 1978 initiative that imposed radical tax limits in California and engendered many other anti-government initiatives, has brought about a severe erosion in public services, particularly education. In the nineteen-sixties, California was among the top ten states in annual per-pupil spending; today, it is thirtieth. In the Los Angeles school district, more than sixty per cent of the students are Latino, and forty-one per cent of elementary students speak limited English. Many are children of undocumented immigrants; some live in garages, sheds, and attics, and move to a different neighborhood, and a different school, every few months. According to one study cited by the mayor's office, more than half never graduate from high school.



Mayoral control is in effect in New York City, Boston, and Chicago, among other places, and has been seen as a management remedy for failing schools, on the ground that it is easier to hold a mayor accountable than a largely anonymous school board. Although results in these cities have been mixed, high-profile mayors like Michael Bloomberg, who ended thirty-two years of school decentralization in New York, and Richard Daley, who took over the Chicago school system in 1995, have been praised for their efforts. But Villaraigosa faced significant obstacles that they did not. Both the Los Angeles City Charter and the state constitution stipulate that the schools be controlled by an elected school board. And the very contours of the Los Angeles Unified School District are daunting; the district serves twenty-six municipalities, in addition to the city of Los Angeles. "The district has over six hundred thousand kids, over eleven hundred school sites, seven billion dollars in a general school fund and nineteen billion in a construction fund," a friend of Villaraigosa's said. "It's too much for the mayor to control."

Some of Villaraigosa's political advisers agreed, telling him that it was an unwise political gamble, since he was unlikely to achieve results, and certainly not before his anticipated run for governor in 2010. Not even the vehement opposition of John Hein, who, Villaraigosa told me, has "one of the great strategic political minds in California," could dissuade him.

When, during the mayoral campaign in early 2005, Villaraigosa proposed that

"Are you the angry young artist or the angry young bloodsucking dealer?"

the mayor should run the schools, Hein called him and said, "'You know how C.T.A. feels about mayoral control. Why would you want to go against your friends?'" Both Hein and Villaraigosa knew that the California Teachers Association was critical to Villaraigosa's future. Ordinarily, the union stays out of mayoral races, but Villaraigosa told me that the teachers' unions contributed heavily to his 2001 race and his 2005 race. ("A million!") Hein explained, "Antonio has always been considered one of us." (Villaraigosa believed that the C.T.A. was investing in him as a future governor, who might free the state from the restraints of Proposition 13.) Villaraigosa was evidently afraid of angering Hein, but unwilling to relinquish the idea. Hein says, "Antonio promised me he didn't really mean what he had said. Then he gave a speech—in which he said the opposite of what he'd told me." Hein says that he called Villaraigosa and told him to lose his phone number. They did not speak for several months.

The rupture worried Villaraigosa, and he began to vacillate. But, just as he had underestimated Hein's power, he failed to anticipate the pressure from supporters on the other side of the schools debate. In July, 2005, shortly after his inauguration, the L.A. *Times* editorial page—which had endorsed him for mayor—began to complain: "The new mayor of Los Angeles boldly proposed taking over the local schools, and then skittered away from the idea. . . . Enough waiting. Enough seeing." Eli Broad, a Villaraigosa supporter, is deeply interested in education reform, and he promoted a bill in the legislature providing for mayoral control. Broad and Bill Gates, through their respective foundations, recently committed close to sixty million dollars to create a campaign, "ED in '08," to make the national education crisis a priority in the Presidential race. And Broad, who has been generous to Los Angeles in large, important ways—saving the Disney Concert Hall project, donating sixty million dollars to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art—is accustomed to deference. Although Villaraigosa agreed with the mayoral-control bill's objective, he didn't think much of its chances and refused to lend his prestige to it. That angered Broad. Villaraigosa told me, "Broad is such an armchair quarterback! I said to him, 'Look, I'd never tell you how to make money. But I know the legislature.'" Villaraigosa also felt that Broad had instigated the pressure from the *Times*.

In early October, approaching the end of his first hundred days in office, Villaraigosa attended a meeting with the *Times* editorial board, whose members criticized him for his inaction on the schools, according to a Villaraigosa aide. An adviser said, "My impression is that, when the rich and powerful and the L.A. *Times* are pounding on you in a synchronized way, most elected officials yield. Early on, Antonio put a rope around his neck with his comments about a mayor taking over. The more he got in, he saw the impracticality. But he thought, How can I look like I'm not deviating from what I said? When push comes to shove, I'm committed."

Villaraigosa decided not to confront the legal obstacles head on. He might have tried to amend the City Charter with a referendum, for example, but polling had shown that mayoral control of the schools was not popular. Instead, he decided to go the legislative route in Sacramento, which he still considered his domain, and where Fabian Núñez, an ally, was Speaker. He announced the broad outlines of his plan in his State of the City address, in April, 2006, and Núñez and Schwarzenegger enthusiastically endorsed the idea. But the California Teachers Association made its strong opposition plain. By June, when it was time for the bill to be introduced, it seemed to Villaraigosa that the C.T.A. had cowed much of the legislature. "They had that place locked down," he said recently, with evident admiration for the union's display of raw power. "I couldn't get a resolution that said, 'His name is Antonio Villaraigosa.' I mean, they had it locked down!"

Villaraigosa was chastened, and since it wasn't in the C.T.A.'s long-term interests to see Villaraigosa politically harmed, Hein came to his rescue. He helped Villaraigosa make a deal with the local teachers' union, which was incorporated into the legislation. Mayoral control was replaced by a mayoral partnership with the superintendent, the school board, and a council of mayors (the representatives of the twenty-six municipalities that, along with the city of Los Angeles, make up the school district). Teachers would have more to say about the curriculum—something they had long sought—and the mayor would assume control of a cluster of three underperforming high schools and their feeder schools.

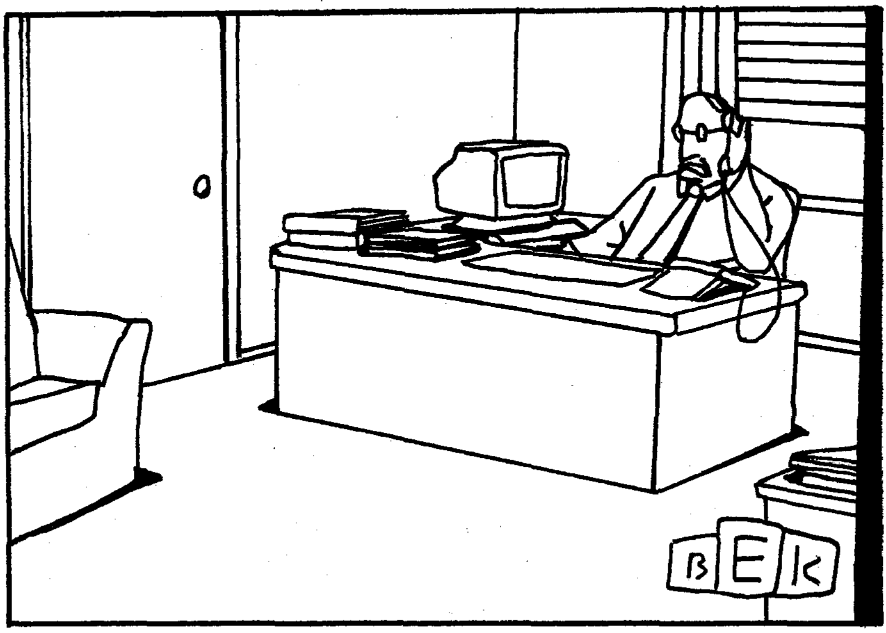
A *Times* editorial attacked the compromise, saying that Villaraigosa had "caved," and Eli Broad wrote him a letter saying that he would not support the bill. Villaraigosa remained obstreperous with Broad. As he recalled, "We kind of got into it, and I told Eli, 'You know, you're used to directing mayors. You don't direct me!' I said, 'How many billionaires are there in this town? Six, seven, eight? There's one mayor. I'm going to tell you right now—this is all I can get, and this is going to be a war!' " (Broad says that he had no recollection of this conversation.)

Representatives of the school district were overwhelmed by the power of the Mayor, the Speaker, and the C.T.A. Many legislators agreed that the bill was a badly flawed and probably unconstitutional amalgam, but they were loath to vote against it. African-American political leaders were particularly critical. It had been shaped without their help, and some saw it as a further instance of Latinos' taking control. In addition, "it was not good public policy, and not very well thought out," according to Mark Ridley-Thomas, a state senator who has known Villaraigosa for more than twenty years, and was one of the few African-American politicians to support him in his 2001 mayoral campaign. Villaraigosa lobbied Ridley-Thomas aggressively, but he abstained. Villaraigosa also met with Maxine Waters, but she was angry about not having been consulted earlier. "You should run something through your allies," a friend of Villaraigosa's told me. "It's a big problem with him. He thinks people will think it's right because he has done it."

The battle for votes seemed to bring out Villaraigosa's rougher edges. He can appear almost menacing when he wants to—holding someone's hand too long, drawing too close. At a reception in Sacramento one night, according to someone who was there, he greeted a man allied with the school district—and then, leaning in toward him, grasped his tie and slowly tightened its knot. (Villaraigosa's office has denied that this happened.)

In the end, the bill passed by a tiny margin, and a large photograph of an exuberant Villaraigosa appeared on the front page of the *Times*. But, after all his deal-making, the result was the antithesis of what he had originally sought. Control of the schools was spread among dozens of officials. Lines of authority were obscured. The superintendent now essentially had multiple bosses—the board, the mayor, and the council of mayors. Villaraigosa had spoken emphatically about the need for accountability. But, if that was the measure, the system was far worse than before. And a few months later, in December, a Superior Court judge ruled that the legislation violated numerous provisions of the state constitution and the Los Angeles City Charter. Rather than seek a settlement with the school district, Villaraigosa proclaimed, "I don't quit!" He focussed on the school-board elections in March, convinced that if he won a majority the school board would give him the cluster—three schools and their feeder schools—that the court had denied him. He poured large sums of money into the elections, but they were indecisive, and runoff elections will be held on May 15th. Even if both his candidates win, he will have only a 4–3 majority. And that underestimates the likely independence of at least a couple of the new members. "Folks around town are saying, 'Once Antonio gets *his* people on the board—' Well, that is nineteenth-century boss thinking, and that just doesn't exist anymore," A. J. Duffy, the president of the local teachers' union, said.

At this point, Villaraigosa seems eager for compromise, and an agreement is evidently being discussed in which he could be given just a single school, perhaps followed by a second one, a year later, if he is deemed to be doing well with the first. It is a modest proposition. This, or some other form of mayoral partnership in the schools, almost certainly could have been negotiated from the start had Villaraigosa chosen to do what he does best—use charm and conciliation to bring everyone to the table. "He could have gone to the district and said 'Look, it's your district, but I want to help you make it work,' " a friend of his told me. "But he was too caught up in this idea of mayoral control, in being part of this list of mayors, like Mike Bloomberg and Richard Daley, who are so successful—without any real consideration of the legal strictures and the politics."



"I would have gotten that report to you sooner, but I wasn't held enough as a child."

Some friends who were dismayed over the school-reform battle wonder whether the Mayor, who has shown an aptitude for the study of power, and for drawing political lessons from defeat, will do so this time. They point out that being an executive is very different from being a legislator, and that he is learning on the job. A little humility would help. As Eli Broad put it, "He wants you to be with him one hundred per cent of the time. He has to realize that ninety-five per cent of the time is pretty good." John Hein says, "He needs to grow, needs to mature," but adds that he would still support Villaraigosa for governor.

Not long ago, I met with Villaraigosa in his mayoral suite at City Hall. He was cheerful and seemed uncharacteristically relaxed. He said that he intends to be heavily involved in the 2008 Presidential election. (Recalling the 2000 election, he said, "I delivered forty-six of forty-seven Assembly Democrats to Al Gore. I go all out, because I know what's at stake.") He mentioned that Hillary Clinton had spent a few hours with him and his family at the mayor's official residence, in Windsor Square. "When Hillary Clinton is one on one, she speaks from the heart," he said. Later that same day, John Edwards had taken him to dinner. More recently, he had breakfast with Senator Barack Obama. When I asked him how he would make up his mind among the three front-runners, he said, "I'm very much a relationship person. What kind of people they are is important to me. I make a lot of decisions from the heart. If you want to be President of the United States, you have to appeal to the heart."

I reminded him that when he spoke at the U.S.C. leadership class a student had asked about the seeming absence of balance in his life, and he had said that he needed to work on that. How was he doing?

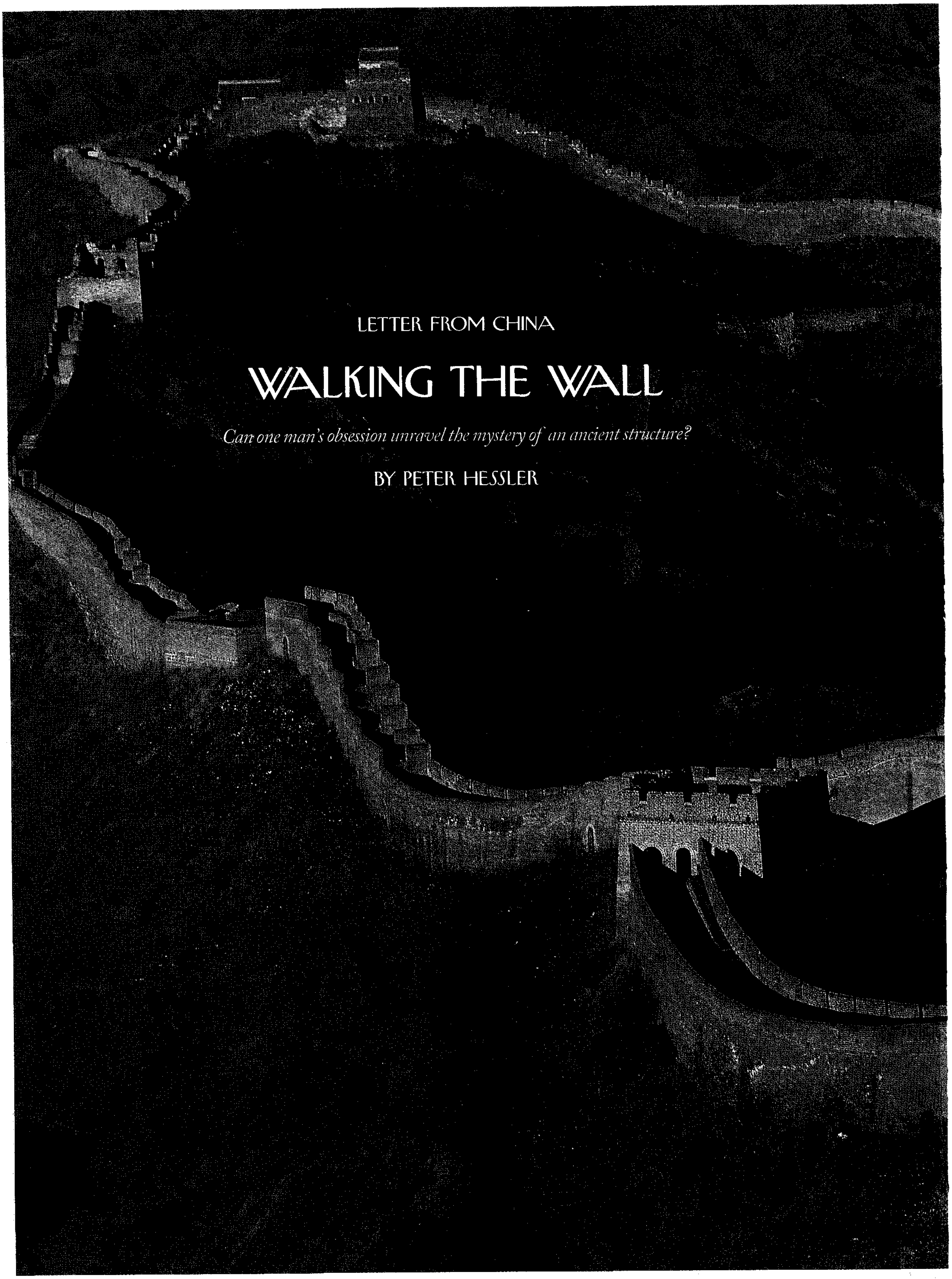
"Right now I can't tell you that there is a balance," he said. "I'm going to have to find it. It's very important. You need the nourishing for the soul, for the heart, for the brain." Villaraigosa says he sleeps only about three or four hours a night. Staff members and his friends have worried that his frenetic pace, combined with the lack of sleep, have made it hard for him to focus. ("His brain is going off like popcorn," one friend said.) Although the Mayor is fanatic about his workout regimen, and loves to challenge associates about who can do more pushups and situps, he suffers from recurrent back pain. After his loss in the 2001 mayoral race, he underwent extensive surgery on his spine. He had another round of surgery, unpublicized, in the fall of 2005, shortly before his trip to Asia, and he is said to have been in considerable discomfort on that trip. He has been losing weight, and on some days he has dark circles under his eyes. A few months ago, the *Times* reported that he had stopped wearing his wedding ring, and quoted him denying rumors that he and his wife had separated. (His aides said that the ring was slipping off his finger, because of his weight loss.) Villaraigosa also said, "In a twenty-year marriage, there are many ups and downs." He started wearing his ring again, but rumors of marital troubles persist.

I asked whether, in retrospect, he saw things that he should have done differently in the school-takeover effort. He paused for a long time, and then said no. "I don't judge success on a day-to-day or month-to-month basis. I fully expect to be part of an effort to transform the L.A. schools, and the measurement of that will be over a much longer period of time."

School reform, though, is no longer at the center of the Villaraigosa mayoralty. Over the past few months, he has shifted his focus to gang violence. Los Angeles has more gang members than any other city in the country, with seven hundred gangs and about forty thousand gang members, mostly black and Latino. Other cities have virulent gang activity, but, as the civil-rights attorney Connie Rice wrote in a recent report on gang violence commissioned by the Los Angeles City Council, "Los Angeles is unique, in its diverse demographics, in its vast geography, and in the scale and entrenched culture of its violence." Arguing that attempts to control the gangs will be inefficient without addressing their root causes, Rice (a second cousin of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice) called for a "Marshall Plan" to end gang violence, at a cost of about a billion dollars, according to some estimates. In mid-April, about three months after Rice released her report, Villaraigosa described his own plan, in his State of the City address. He, too, believes that any effort to control gangs must be accompanied by community prevention and intervention strategies, but his proposals were on a dramatically smaller scale, with a budget of a hundred and sixty-eight million dollars.

Villaraigosa's partner in the anti-gang initiative is Chief Bratton, who reformed New York City's Police Department in the nineties and, despite his differences with his old boss, Rudolph Giuliani, and the MacArthur Park melee, is widely regarded as one of the most effective and innovative police chiefs in the country. "Mayor Giuliani was a micromanager—he wanted to be involved in the minutest details," Bratton said recently. "That became a problem for me, because it didn't allow me to manage the N.Y.P.D.—too many of the decisions were made at City Hall. Villaraigosa is just the opposite. In the two years of working with him, I've never had a phone call about a personnel matter or a disciplinary decision." Since Bratton arrived in Los Angeles, in 2002, he has argued strenuously that the city needs many more police officers. Mayor Hahn failed to win the necessary funds from the City Council. Villaraigosa, in his first year as mayor, collaborated with the council to impose a trash-collection fee that would fund the hiring of a thousand new police officers by 2009. Although Bratton is appreciative, he says he is still desperately short-handed. "I have nine thousand police officers right now. To have the equivalent of what I had in New York, I'd have to have eighteen thousand." And, he added, "the crime problem in New York was nothing on the scale of these types of gangs and the violence they engage in." Still, Bratton insists, the reduction in crime and improvement in quality of life that occurred in New York can happen in Los Angeles, too, if adequate resources become available. "Los Angeles and New York are effectively the America of the future," he said. "They're literally probably fifty years ahead of most of the rest of America, because they are immigrant entrance points and the makeup of the country is most dynamically reflected in them. They both have issues of overcrowding, and large numbers of minorities, with all those tensions. So they're the experiments of the future."

Not everyone is so pleased with Villaraigosa's anti-gang mission. It is somewhat reminiscent of his school-takeover attempt in its scale and complexity, and perhaps even more quixotic. It reflects Villaraigosa's penchant for taking on a seemingly insurmountable problem and attacking it with energy and theatrics—he began the campaign by releasing a "Ten Most Wanted" list, followed by a series of quick arrests of several of the people on it—rather than the careful study and measured initiatives that would be more likely to bring about change. Villaraigosa's adviser Richard Alatorre told him that the gangs were here when they were boys and would remain long after they and their children were gone. Villaraigosa, who will soon be starting his third year as mayor, clearly needs to show some measurable results. He was chagrined, he said, to read a Los Angeles *Times* editorial mocking the rhetoric of his State of the City speech: " 'Dream with me,' the mayor called, as he did at his inauguration. But dream time is over. It's time to go to work." ♦



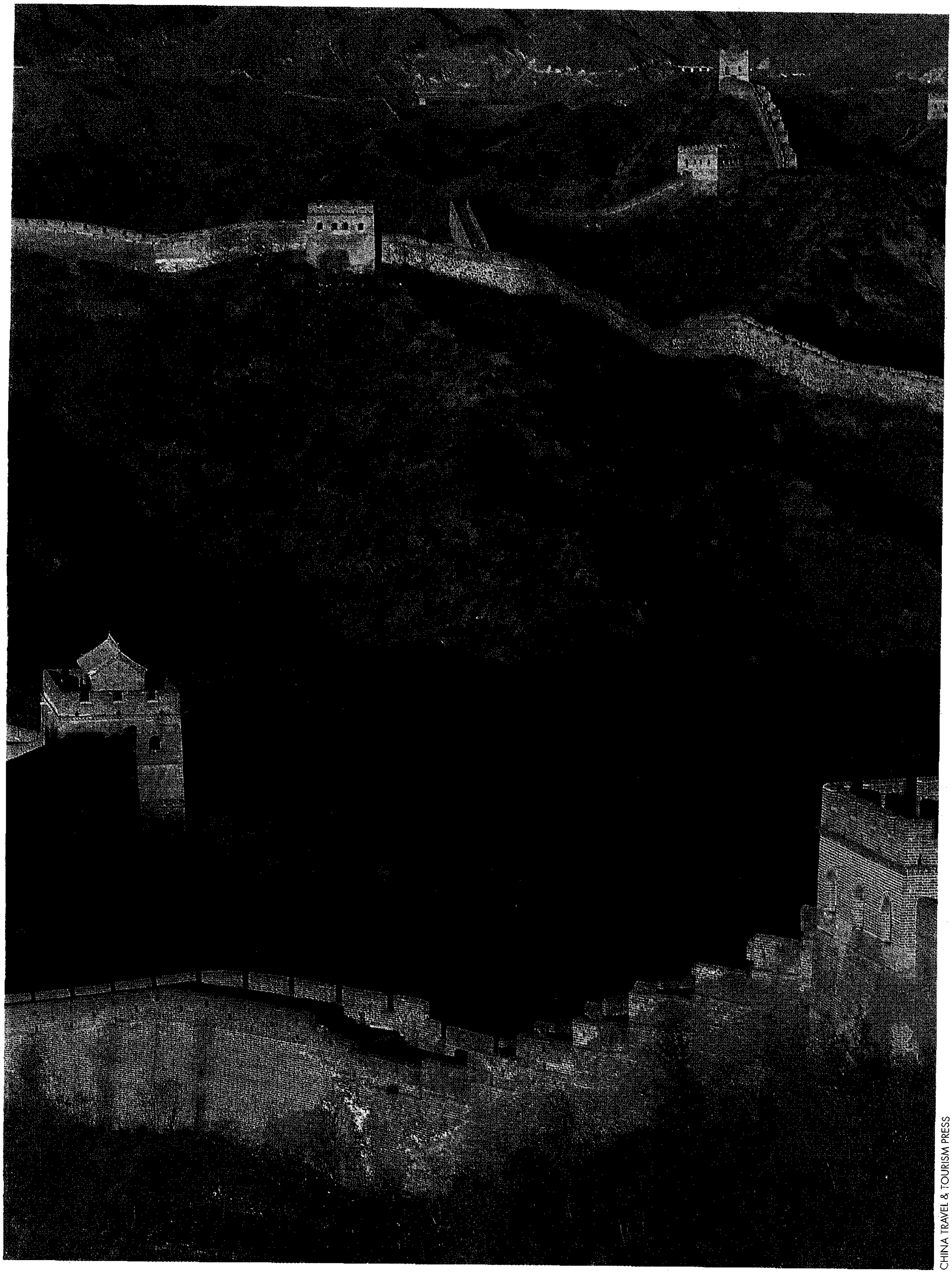
LETTER FROM CHINA

WALKING THE WALL

Can one man's obsession unravel the mystery of an ancient structure?

BY PETER HESSLER

There isn't a scholar at any university in the world who specializes in the Great Wall. The fortifications have been poorly preserved,



CHINA TRAVEL & TOURISM PRESS

the past many sections of low-lying wall were plundered for building materials, especially during the Cultural Revolution.

When the weather is good, or when I'm tired of having seven million neighbors, I drive north from downtown Beijing. It takes an hour and a half to reach Sancha, a quiet village where I rent a farmhouse. The road dead-ends at the village, but a footpath continues into the mountains. The trail forks twice, climbs for a steep mile through a forest of walnut and oak, and terminates at the Great Wall of China.

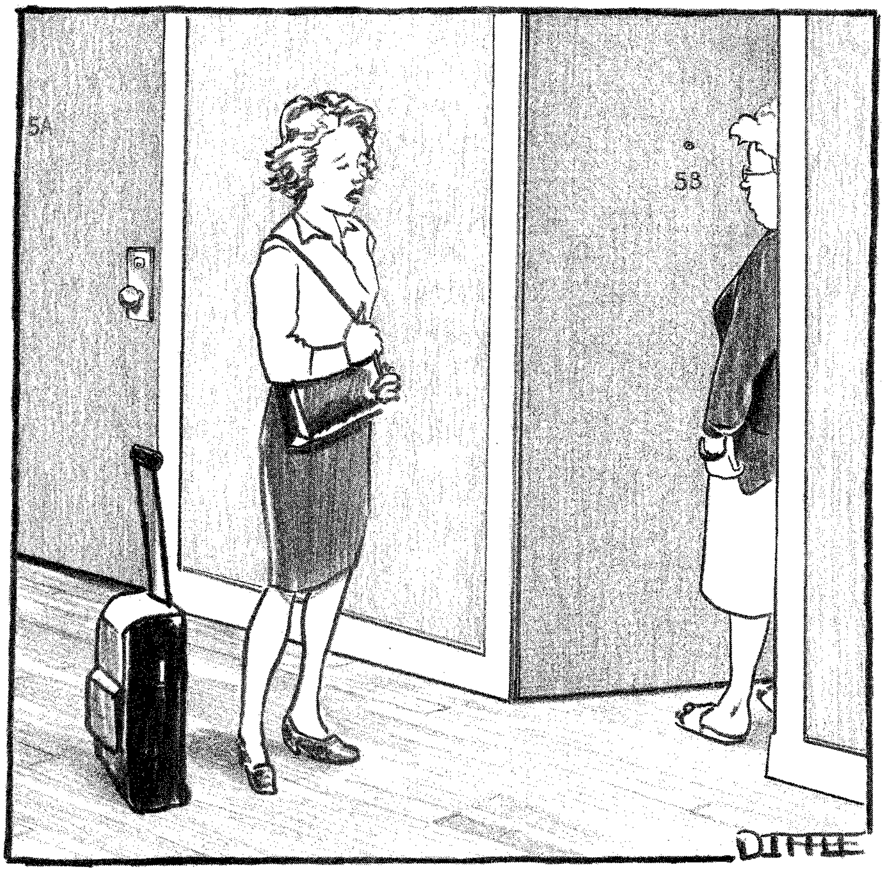
Once, I packed a tent, hiked up from the village, and walked eastward atop the wall for two days without seeing another person. Tourists rarely visit this area, where the wall is perched high along a ridgeline, magnificent in its isolation. The structure is made of stone, brick, and mortar; there are crenellations and archer slits, and guard towers that rise more than twenty feet high. The tallest one is known locally as the Great Eastern Tower, and just before it an inscribed marble tablet sits on the wall. Originally, there were many such tablets, but this is one of fewer than ten that are known to remain on the wall in the Beijing region. The inscription notes that in 1615 A.D. a crew of two thousand four hundred soldiers built a section of the wall which was fifty-eight *zhang* and five *cun* long. That's about six hundred and fifty feet, and the bureaucratic precision of the inscription, in this forgotten place, seems as lonely as words can be.

In November of 2005, I hiked to the Great Eastern Tower with two friends who were visiting from New York. After reaching the tower, we began the long descent to the south. This stretch can be treacherous: many of the brick ramparts have collapsed. I was picking my way downhill when something in the rubble caught my eye. It was white—too white to be brick, too big to be mortar. I dug it out and saw four neat rows of carved characters.

It was a fragment of another marble tablet. I could make out some of the words: something was six *chi* high, and something else was two *zhang*. But the writing was in classical Chinese, which I've never studied, and the surface was badly scarred.

"How long do you think it's been buried here?" one of my friends asked.

"I have no idea," I said. But I knew one person who might be able to tell me. My friends and I covered the artifact with loose bricks, and I memorized the location. A month later, I returned with David Spindler.



"I'm going away for the weekend. Would you mind feeding my husband?"

David Spindler stands six feet seven, and he is reserved in a way that is characteristic of many men who are very tall and thin. For years, I'd seen him occasionally at social gatherings in Beijing, where he always seemed to make sure that he was sitting down. He is thirty-nine years old, with short sandy hair, a long face, and gentle eyes. He chooses his words very carefully. Since 2002, he has worked full time as an independent scholar of the Great Wall, and although he has no academic affiliation or outside funding, he has become one of its leading researchers.

On a cold December morning, Spindler and I set off to find the marble tablet. In the city, everything about his appearance had seemed chosen to avoid attention. But in the mountains he wore a red-checked wool hunting shirt, a floppy white Tilley safari hat, high-end La Sportiva mountaineering boots, and large elk-leather gloves designed for utility-line workers by J. Edwards of Chicago. He looked like a scarecrow of specialty gear—some limbs equipped for hard labor, others for intense recreation. Over the years, Spindler had determined that this was precisely the right ensemble for the Great Wall, where thorns and branches are common. For a face mask, he'd cut a leg off a pair of sweatpants, scissored a round hole, and pulled it over his head. ("It covers your neck.") He wore polyurethane-coated L. L. Bean hunting trousers that had been reinforced by his neighborhood tailor. Denim patches covered the pants, like a friendship quilt linking Freeport and Beijing.

We followed the wall east. Every hundred yards or so, it connected to a tower. These structures were crumbling but still impressive, with high vaulted ceilings and arched windows. Periodically, Spindler pointed out details: a place where a door used to be barred, a brick frame that had once held an inscribed tablet.

"The towers and the wall were totally different projects," he said. "First, you had the brick towers, and the wall was just local stone. And then they came and improved the wall. That's why these towers look a little funny."

He pointed out a place where the wall's crenellation ran into the open window of a tower—the kind of thing that happens when you use two different contractors. Near the Great Eastern Tower, one section of wall had fallen down entirely. Spindler believed that the construction project of 1615 had ended right there, at the edge of a short precipice. He had measured it once, using the details found on the marble tablet near the tower. "These guys really hosed the next construction crew," he said. "What could they do? It's really hard to build from that point."

I had hiked this section perhaps fifty times, but I had never noticed the details of construction. In my mind, it was simply the Great Wall—complete and virtually timeless. For Spindler, though, it was a work of pieces and seasons. Construction generally took place in the spring, when the weather was good but Mongol raiders weren't active. "Energy in the Mongol world was fat on the horses," Spindler said. "They didn't have that after the winter, so the spring was not a good season for raiding. Summer was too hot. They didn't like the heat; they didn't like the insects. The Mongol bowstrings were made of hide, and with the humidity they supposedly went flat—this is described in Ming texts. Most raids took place in the fall."

We came to the smashed tablet, and he crouched in the cold, running a finger along the carved characters. He recognized it immediately as a piece of a tablet that dated to 1614. The county antiquities bureau had recorded its inscription in 1988, but not its original location on the wall, and since then it had disappeared. Some looter had probably broken it.

"It's saying the height of the wall, including the crenellations," he explained. "And then it starts in with all the names of the officials. God, it's good that somebody got this down before it was destroyed."

Spindler took a tape measure to the fragment, calculated the space between lines, and quickly computed the original dimensions. Slowly, he walked back along the wall, looking for a place where it could have been mounted. He measured an empty brick-bordered ledge: perfect fit. For this small section of the wall, he now knew the basic story of two construction campaigns in the sixteen-tens. Before leaving, we returned the fragment to the spot where I had found it.

While we were there, a peasant hiked up from the south. He was trapping game; a dozen wire snares were looped over his shoulder. If the presence of a six-foot-seven foreigner in a floppy hat and elk-leather gauntlets surprised the man, he didn't show it. He asked if we had extra water, and Spindler gave him a bottle. During the following year, Spindler and I hiked through several villages together, and each time locals hardly seemed to distinguish between the two of us. Andrew Field, a friend of Spindler's who teaches Chinese history at the University of New South Wales, once told me that an unusually tall person might feel more comfortable here than in America. "In China, sure, he's a monster," Field said. "But aren't we all?"

In 221 B.C., Qin Shihuang became the first ruler in Chinese history to declare himself emperor. After consolidating power, he commanded the construction across the north of roughly three thousand miles of *changcheng*. The term translates as either "long wall" or "long walls"—Chinese doesn't differentiate between singular and plural—and the barriers consisted of hard-packed earth. Over the centuries, many other dynasties faced the same basic problem as the Qin: the wide-open frontier of the northern plains made them vulnerable to the nomadic Mongol and Turkic tribes that inhabited these lands. The nomadic threat was more intense in some periods than in others, and Chinese dynasties responded with different strategies. The Tang, who ruled from 618 to 907 A.D., built virtually no walls, because the imperial family was part Turkic and skilled in Central Asian warfare and diplomacy. Even when dynasties constructed walls, they didn't necessarily call them *changcheng;* more than ten terms were used to describe the fortifications.

The Ming usually called theirs *bianqiang*—"border wall(s)"—and they became the greatest wall builders in Chinese history. They came to power in 1368, after the collapse of the Yuan, a short-lived Mongol dynasty that had been founded by Kublai Khan. The Ming constructed large fortifications of quarried stone and brick in the Beijing region—these are the iconic structures (some of them rebuilt and restored) that seem to continue endlessly in tourist photographs. They were the only dynasty to build extensively with such durable materials, and many sections of Ming wall ran for miles. But the *bianqiang* was a network rather than a single structure, and some regions had as many as four distinct lines of fortifications.

In 1644, domestic rebels stormed the capital, and the Ming emperor committed suicide. In desperation, a military commander in the northeast opened a major *bianqiang* gate to the Manchus, a northern tribe, in the hope that they would restore the ruling family. Instead, the Manchus founded their own dynasty, the Qing, which lasted until 1912. The Qing had little use for the walls, which were abandoned to the elements.

As Western explorers and missionaries began to penetrate China in the eighteenth century, they toured the Ming ruins and confused them with stories of Qin Shihuang's three-thousand-mile wall. Foreigners assumed that the Beijing region's trellised brick fortifications were part of an unbroken line that had stretched across the north for two thousand years. In 1793, an Englishman named Sir John Barrow saw a section of wall near Beijing and, extrapolating from its measurements, declared that the entire structure must have contained enough stone to build two smaller walls around the equator. (Westerners rarely visited China's west, where most walls were made of tamped earth.) At that time, foreigners usually called it "the Chinese wall," but by the end of the nineteenth century, as the exaggerations accumulated, it had become the Great Wall of China. In February of 1923, a *National Geographic* article began, "According to astronomers, the only work of man's hands which would be visible to the human eye from the moon is the Great Wall of China." (It wasn't visible from the moon in 1923, and it still isn't.)

Eventually, the misconceptions made their way back to China. Under threat of foreign domination, leaders like Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong realized the propaganda value of a unified barrier. *Changcheng* became the equivalent of "the Great Wall," a term that encompassed all northern fortifications, regardless of location or dynastic origin. It delineated what was, essentially, an imaginary structure—a single, millennia-old wall.

Today, the concept of the Great Wall

is so broad that it resists formal definition. When I met with scholars and preservationists in Beijing, I asked how *changcheng* should be defined, and I never heard the same thing twice. Some said that in order for a structure to qualify as part of the Great Wall it had to be at least a hundred kilometres long; others believed that any border fortification should qualify. Some emphasized that it had to have been built by ethnic Chinese, whereas others included walls built by non-Chinese tribes. Nobody could give an accurate length estimate, because there has never been a systematic survey. Last year, various articles in *China Daily* described the Great Wall as thirty-nine hundred miles, forty-five hundred miles, and thirty-one thousand miles long.

There isn't a scholar at any university in the world who specializes in the Great Wall. In China, historians typically focus on political institutions, while archeologists excavate tombs. The Great Wall fits into neither tradition, and even within a more discretely defined topic—say, the Ming wall—there's almost no scholarship. The fortifications have been poorly preserved, and in the past many sections of low-lying wall were plundered for building materials, especially during the Cultural Revolution. In the nineteen-eighties, a Harvard Ph.D. student named Arthur Waldron became interested in the relationship between Chinese and nomadic groups. "So I went to the library and thought I would find a big book in Chinese or maybe Japanese that would have everything about the Great Wall," he told me recently. "But I didn't. I thought that was strange. I began to compile a bibliography, and after a while I said, 'This does not add up to the image that we have.' "

In 1990, Waldron published "The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth." Drawing on Ming texts—he didn't conduct significant field research—Waldron described key aspects of wall building during that dynasty. He also identified many modern misconceptions about the wall, including the notion that it's a single structure. It was a breakthrough book, and one that should have provided a foundation for further scholarship. But since then there hasn't been another work of significant new archeological or historical research, apart from one Chinese book by a surveying team that describes a six-hundred-mile series of Ming fortifications in the east. (Another book, published last year, "The Great Wall: China Against the World, 1000 B.C.-A.D. 2000," by Julia Lovell, a fellow at Cambridge, is primarily concerned with exploring the wall as a symbol for the Chinese world view. She draws a parallel, for example, between the ancient wall and the current government's Internet firewalls.)

In China, one of the best-known experts, Cheng Dalin, is not an academic but a retired photographer. For more than twenty years, Cheng specialized in taking pictures of the wall for the Xinhua News Service. In his spare time, he studied history, and he has published eight books, combining photographs and research. "The Great Wall touches on so many subjects—politics, military affairs, architecture, archeology, history," he told me. "Within each specialty, it's too small. And taken as a whole it's too big. You have to find little bits in so many different books; it's not concentrated in one place. And nobody will pay you! How will you eat? How can a person spend ten years reading all these books?"

David Spindler first started hiking the Great Wall in 1994, when he was the only American studying for a master's degree in history at Peking University. He had always been athletic—as a student at Dartmouth, he'd rowed varsity

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A CARTOON OF HURT

Burglar noise brought me downstairs bare-chested
wielding my daughter's aluminum softball bat
as if in 3 A.M. living-room shadowland
I'd be terrible Hector instead of a senior English professor

and there you were, my father—
forty years dead, rummaging my liquor,
younger than me now and ageless and faint,
your grip too soft to lift the fifths and quarts

but rattling them to the old family music:
falsetto amber-bottle-scrape-and-clink of a man
rushing to fix himself a drink, as you always did
the moment you came home from work.

How could you be so unchanged by death?
Even out of this world you want out of this world.
—Unchanged in me, I guess. Watching you,
aluminum softball bat drooping like a penis,

I'm a cartoon of hurt, embarrassed by it.
"Dad," I whimper, but you can't hear it.
You abandon the liquor to open the refrigerator.
Its sudden light flashes through you like a bomb blast.

The twist-off beer caps shred your hands to Kleenex.
The pull-tab of a tallboy pulls half a finger off.
You howl in pain you couldn't feel but felt,
the same pain of yours I couldn't feel but felt,

which now morphs obligingly into all my ugliness,
demons and ogres dancing in my kitchen,
envy and resentment, despair and disappointment
spitting and farting, sticking out their thorned tongues.

—*Michael Ryan*

crew and was on the cross-country ski team—and he saw hiking as the perfect break from city life. At Peking University, he wrote a master's thesis in Chinese about Dong Zhongshu, a philosopher in the Western Han dynasty, in the second century B.C. After receiving his degree, Spindler decided against pursuing a career in academia. For a spell, he worked as an assistant in CNN's Beijing bureau, and then he became a China market analyst for Turner Broadcasting. But neither journalism nor business felt right, and the only constant in those years was hiking the Great Wall.

In 1997, he entered Harvard Law School. It was a homecoming—he'd grown up in Lincoln, Massachusetts—but he missed Beijing and found himself searching for distractions. ("I split a lot of wood," he told me.) During his first vacation, Spindler returned to China to hike. By then, he had the idea that in his spare time he could write a book about the Ming-dynasty Great Wall, and he began reading histories. After graduation, he accepted a consulting job in the Beijing office of McKinsey & Company; every free weekend, he hiked or studied Ming texts. Finally, after two years at McKinsey, he quit in order to pursue his research full time. His goals were ambitious: to hike every section of the Great Wall in the Beijing region and to read every word about the structure that was written during the Ming dynasty.

Spindler had paid off his law-school loans, and he had sixty thousand dollars in savings. He expected that it would take him a year or two to complete his field work. He hiked to wall sections, took notes, and recorded details on a spreadsheet. Often, he saw more wall in the distance, and he marked these sitings on another database, which identified future research trips. The to-do list seemed to get longer with every journey. In 1985, a Chinese satellite survey had identified three hundred and ninety miles of wall in the Beijing region, but Spindler found that the fortifications were actually much longer.

He became a fixture in the National Library of China. He read from the Ming Veritable Records, a day-to-day history of the dynasty, and he tracked down the reports of various Ming officials. Sometimes he found a specialized work dedicated to wall defense. Some books could only be located elsewhere, so he spent weeks on the road. In a freezing library in Guangzhou, he read a detailed Ming guide to key wall fortifications; as far as he could tell, the book had not been quoted since 1688. He flew to Japan in order to read an obscure Chinese history written by Yin Geng, an official who served in the Ministry of Defense during the mid-sixteenth century. Spindler spent three weeks in Tokyo, and during that time he ate dinner in a restaurant twice. The other nights, he cooked pasta, cabbage, and tomato sauce and poured yogurt on top. ("It's cheaper than cheese.") In Beijing, he rented a small apartment in a run-down building for two hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. At the Miyun bus station, which is close to many sections of wall, the minivan drivers began greeting him by shouting, "Beidianzi, six yuan!" Beidianzi is a village, and six yuan is the deal Spindler struck after an epic bargaining session that has become part of Miyun minivan lore.

Over four years, he earned a total of six thousand two hundred dollars from the occasional lecture or consulting job. In 2003, he applied for a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, which occasionally funds projects by independent scholars. A panel of anonymous academics assessed the proposal, and they were withering. One wrote, "The applicant has no track record as an interpreter of the humanities." Another remarked, "Likelihood of completion: Not clear." The following year, with guidance from former classmates who had become professors, Spindler applied again. This time, the evaluations were positive, at least in the terms of a jargon that is nearly as formalized as classical Chinese. (Panelist 1: "I feel that [the proposed book] would be a quality interpreter of the humanities.") But the application was still rejected.

In Beijing, Spindler dated a former law-school classmate who had become an executive at Siemens. "She was very supportive," he told me. "I couldn't have asked for anything more." But he kept finding more Great Wall and more Ming texts; finally, in 2005, they parted ways. "It's certainly the reason we broke up," he said. "She couldn't see an end to it."

At the time of our first hike, Spindler had been researching for nine years, with the past four devoted entirely to the project. But he had yet to publish one word about the wall, and he had no formal contact with academia. He was extremely cautious, in part because he had grown accustomed to working in isolation. Nobody had ever combined field and textual research in this depth—it would have been impossible for any academic based in the United States or Europe—and his methodology had become as demanding and idiosyncratic as his hiking gear. In his mind, it was pointless to begin writing while his to-do spreadsheet still listed more than a hundred days of hiking.

The numbers consumed him. During our trip to the Great Eastern Tower, he commented that it was the eightieth day he'd spent on the wall that year. Since 2005, he has dated K. C. Swanson, an American freelance journalist who lives

PRESCRIPTIONS Rx
REGULAR STRENGTH
MAXIMUM STRENGTH
CELEBRITY STRENGTH
CHENEY

Gahan Wilson

"Don't worry—it's just a phase."

• •

in Beijing. "David tends to remember days in relation to his wall hikes," she told me. "One day he told me, 'This is our one-year anniversary,' and he said that we had started dating two days after a certain trip he took. It's like primitive cultures where people date things by when the volcano erupted."

In 2006, Spindler began giving more lectures—his main client was Abercrombie & Kent, a high-end travel service—and his income rose to twenty-nine thousand dollars. He has no hobbies to speak of, and his bookshelf is devoted almost entirely to wall research. He owns five CDs. He has always had many close friends in the city, Chinese and foreign, but few understand his obsession. He never romanticizes the wall, telling its history with the precision one would expect of a lawyer and a consultant. (In describing a series of attacks on the wall in the sixteenth century, Spindler told me that a Mongol leader adopted "what people at McKinsey would call a 'me-too strategy.' ") "A couple of times I've tried to ask why it really gets him," Swanson said. "Maybe it could be easily explained in an emotional way, but that's not how David is. He's an eminently rational person doing what is basically an irrational thing."

In October, I accompanied Spindler on his three-hundred-and-thirty-first journey into the field. By public bus and hired minivan, we travelled to a remote village called Shuitou. In 2003, while visiting the wall here, Spindler had seen some high ridges that he thought might contain more fortifications. In the village, he had also studied a Ming wall tablet that was now kept in a peasant's home. Last year, the Chinese government passed the first national law protecting the Great Wall, and Ming artifacts cannot be bought or sold, but the remoteness of many sections has made enforcement difficult.

In Shuitou, we asked about the tablet, and a woman told us that the owner was out of town.

"Do you want to buy it?" she asked.

Spindler declined, and then told me, "They offered to sell it last time, too."

The harvest was nearly finished, and the wind rustled stalks of corn that stood dead in the fields. Beyond the village, we climbed a steep section of wall, where thousands of Mongols had attacked in 1555. Spindler said that the typical Chinese defense relied on crude cannons, arrows, cudgels, and even rocks. "There were regulations about how many stones you were supposed to have, and how you were supposed to bring them to the second floor of the tower if there was an attack," he said. Later, he pointed out a circle of loose stones that had been carefully arranged atop the wall. Four and a half centuries later, they were still waiting for the next attack.

The Mongols liked to come at night. They travelled on horseback, usually in small groups. Near enemy territory, they followed ridgelines, because they feared ambushes. They were not occupiers. They penetrated Chinese lands, gathered booty, and returned home as quickly as possible. They liked to steal livestock, valuables, household goods, and Chinese people. They carried the men and women back to the steppes and forced them to form families. Then they sent the men south to gather information on Chinese defenses, using their wives and children as hostages.

The most vivid accounts of the Mongols were provided by Chinese officers who served in the north. Yin Geng, the author of the book that Spindler read in Japan, had particularly intimate contact with Mongols during the mid-fifteen-hundreds. ("They like to fornicate, paying little attention to whether it's day or night or whether there's anyone watching.") Like most Ming writers, he calls them *lu*—barbarians. ("Every barbarian family brews alcohol and all of them like to drink; the barbarians drink like cattle, not even stopping to breathe in the process.") His account is a dark sort of anthropology, written in the hope that the reader will come to both know and hate the enemy. ("Barbarians like to spear babies for sport.")

Arthur Waldron identified three basic Ming strategies for dealing with the northerners. In the early Ming, the Chinese often took the offensive, pushing Mongol settlements away from the frontier. The second approach was buying off key Mongol leaders with gifts, official titles, or opportunities for trade. But some Ming emperors refused to negotiate with people they believed were savages. The third option was building defensive walls—an ineffective tactic, in Waldron's view, and one that he compares to the Maginot Line. Wall building became the trademark of the later Ming, he writes, because the dynasty had become too weak to fight and too proud to conduct diplomacy.

Spindler believes that the late-Ming response was less rigid than that. In his reading, he has found that the Chinese tactics varied locally, depending upon specific threats. And wall building was often coördinated with offensive and accommodationist strategies. In any case, he is convinced that no Chinese policy could completely resolve their problems with the Mongols, whose internal power struggles contributed to the raiding. In Mongol culture, legitimate leadership was supposed to be confined to the direct heir of Genghis Khan, and to pass only to the firstborn son of each generation. Outside that narrow line, ambitious contenders often found that the easiest opportunities to gain status lay to the south.

In the fifteen-forties, Altan Khan was frustrated by his genealogical standing—he was the second son of a third son—and so he attempted to improve his lot by establishing trade relations with the Chinese. The reigning Ming emperor, Jiajing, refused. On September 26, 1550, the night of the mid-autumn festival, Altan Khan led tens of thousands of Mongols on a surprise attack northeast of Beijing. They breached the crude stone wall there and pillaged for two weeks, killing and capturing thousands of Chinese. After that, the Ming began using mortar on a large scale to improve the fortifications.

The oldest son of Altan Khan, known as the Yellow Prince, tried a different strategy. He married dozens of women from important Mongol families as a means of solidifying his alliances with them. But he began to have financial problems, which he solved by sending the women back. Accompanied by their families, the ex-wives began visiting Chinese wall garrisons, demanding support. In 1576, after one such appeal was rejected, a raiding party penetrated a gap in a remote part of the defense network. The region was so rugged that the Ming believed that no wall was necessary, but the Mongols got through, killing twenty-nine Chinese. The Ming responded with another major wall-building campaign, this time using brick, which allowed construction on even the steepest terrain. Spindler calls the incident of 1576 "the raid of the scorned Mongol women"—a failed harem that helped to inspire the stunning brick fortifications of Beijing.

Historians generally portray the Great Wall as a military failure and a waste of resources. Spindler disagrees, noting that the improved wall held back major attacks in the sixteenth century. At Shuitou, where we hiked, the Chinese defeated thousands of Mongols. For the Ming, the wall was only part of a complex foreign policy, but, because it's the most obvious relic, it receives disproportionate blame for their fall.

"People say, was it worth it?" Spindler said. "But I don't think that's how they thought at the time. You don't get a nation-state saying, 'We're going to give up this terrain' or 'We're going to sacrifice *x* number of citizens and soldiers.' That's not a calculus they used. An empire is always going to try to protect itself."

In the afternoon, we bushwhacked. On his hikes, Spindler sometimes followed game trails, and often he walked atop wall sections, where the brush is less dense. But occasionally there was no option other than to pursue a ridge straight through the brambles. He called this "hiking like a Mongol," and I hated it. I hated the thorns, and I hated the bad footing. I hated how my clothes got torn, and I hated the superiority of Spindler's bizarre wall regalia. I hated how branches that were chest-high for him hit me in the face. Mostly, I hated the Mongols for hiking this way.

When we reached the ruins of an old stone fort atop a ridge, it felt as if we had emerged from a long swim underwater. To the east, the view opened for twenty miles. Only a single settlement was visible—the village of Zhenbiancheng, still surrounded by the high stone walls of a Ming garrison. Looking down on the walled settlement, Spindler remarked that it had been a hardship post, where commanders had requested that soldiers be paid in grain rather than in silver. "There was bad inflation during the Ming," he said. "It was connected to the discovery of silver in the New World."

The next morning, after camping for the night, we discovered faint traces of another stone fort with a sight line to the ridge. Spindler theorized that they had both been used to send signals to Zhenbiancheng. (Chinese used gunpowder blasts to communicate along the fortifications; Mongols used smoke signals.)

Spindler was skilled at deconstructing the wall, but eventually he would have to create something out of all the pieces. The facts were scattered in remote places, on high ridges, and in lost books, and they could be as distracting as a thorn in the face. "Because David is not ensconced in academia, he's got a lot more freedom to develop his own line of inquiry," his friend Andrew Field told me. But there was a risk to the isolation. "I'm trying to urge him to seek closure," Field said. "But, the way David's mind works, he has an amazing ability for detail."

The bushwhacking was intensely time-consuming, and it could also be dangerous. During our hike above Zhenbiancheng, Spindler said that in 1998 a friend had fallen off a tower and broken his wrist. They worried about descending late in the day, so they spent the night on the wall. In retrospect, Spindler regretted not descending immediately.

"Was he in pain?" I asked.

"Yeah," Spindler said. "He was in a lot of pain."

Spindler always told friends where he was hiking, and he almost never made overnight trips alone. His most frequent companion is Li Jian, a classmate from Peking University who now works in the rare-books division of the National Library. Her first expedition with Spindler, in 2000, was a three-day hike. "I had always had problems with insomnia," she told me. "But when I got back from that hike I slept really well!" Since then, she has spent a hundred and eighty-five days on the wall with Spindler.

In time, Li Jian acquired an L. L. Bean wool hunting shirt, a white Tilley hat, La Sportiva mountaineering boots, and elk-leather line-worker gloves from J. Edwards of Chicago. She cut off a pair of long underwear at the knee and scissored a round hole for her face. In the field, she's a five-foot-two Chinese double of Spindler, following him through the brush.

In June of 2003, they set off for a three-day hike in the wilds of Mentougou, in the western Beijing region. The mountains there are weirdly shaped; the high peaks are easy to negotiate, but the lower flanks deteriorate into unexpected cliffs. Hiking like a Mongol, Spindler got lost, and every attempt to go down ended at a sheer drop. They ran out of food after three days. Fortunately, it had rained, so they drank water that had settled in the hollows of rocks. Friends organized a search party and drove out from Beijing. Five days after Spindler and Li Jian had set off, they finally found a trail and made it back, meeting the search party en route. Today, Li Jian continues to hike the wall as therapy for insomnia.

Chinese universities may not have produced Great Wall specialists, but a small community of wall enthusiasts has developed outside academia. They tend to be athletic—a rare quality among the Chinese intelligentsia. And the Great Wall attracts obsessives. Dong Yaohui, a former utility-line worker, left his job in 1984 and doggedly followed wall sections on foot for thousands of miles across China. After writing a book about the experience, he helped found the Great Wall Society of China, which publishes two journals and advocates preservation of the fortifications. Cheng Dalin, the retired Xinhua photographer, graduated from a sports academy. William Lindesay, a British geologist and marathoner, came to China in 1986 and spent nine months running and hiking along the wall. He settled in Beijing, published four wall-related books, and founded International Friends of the Great Wall, a small organization that also focusses on conservation.

The most active Great Wall researcher at Peking University is a policeman named Hong Feng. As a child, he enrolled in a sports school—he became a sprinter and a long jumper—but he always enjoyed reading history. After barely missing the cutoff for admission to college, he entered the police academy, and was eventually assigned to the city's unit at Peking University. In the mid-nineteen-nineties, he began hiking recreationally and was disappointed with contemporary books about the wall. "They make too many mistakes," he told me. "So I started reading the original texts."

I met Hong Feng in the Peking University police station, where he was working a twenty-four-hour shift. He is the station's supervisor, and uses his days off for hiking trips. At forty-five, Hong is tall and extremely fit, although he suffers from a chronically sore right elbow, which was injured when he fell while researching. He often visits the university library, but he has never discussed his research with professors. "Scholars in the archeology and history departments just aren't interested in the Great Wall," he told me.

During his hikes, Hong Feng noticed a puzzling fifteen-mile gap in fortifications to the northwest of Beijing. Modern writers had claimed that the landscape was so rugged that it didn't require defenses, which made no sense to Hong. He had visited other areas that were much steeper yet heavily fortified, so he turned to the Ming Veritable Records. He discovered that the Ming believed the region contained an important *longmai*, or dragon vein, just north of their ancestral tombs. A dragon vein is a ridgeline critical to feng-shui, so the Ming went to the trouble of building elaborate walls farther north, on terrain that was naturally less defensible.

Hong Feng published an article about his findings on www.thegreatwall.com.cn, which has become home to the most vibrant community of Chinese wall enthusiasts. The site was launched by Zhang Jun, a software engineer, on May 8, 1999—the day that the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was bombed by NATO. (NATO said that the attack was a mistake.) Members of the Web site have regular dinners in Beijing, and at one of the events I asked Zhang Jun why he had been inspired to found the Web site on that particular date. "You can say that the Great Wall was built to protect China," he said, choosing his words carefully.

The Web site has five thousand members, many of whom are interested in the wall for a combination of patriotic and recreational reasons, although there's also a small community of serious researchers. David Spindler joined in 2000. Like everybody else, he adopted an online name—Spindler's is Ah Lun, a derivative of the Chinese name that he was given by a language teacher—and he frequently corresponds with others in Chinese. But he doesn't attend functions, and he has never identified himself as a foreigner. Starting last fall, he posted two long Chinese articles on the Web site, describing the construction history of specific sections of wall. He told me that he would eventually write his book in English, but for initial articles it made sense to write in Chinese, because the Web site is the only community that cares about such discrete topics.

Spindler had asked me not to identify him to the other members of the Great Wall Web site, and I didn't, but they quickly brought up Ah Lun on their own. Hong Feng, the policeman, spoke admiringly of Ah Lun's research, assuming that he was Chinese. "He doesn't write very much, but what he writes is deep," Hong said. "He must be some kind of graduate student or scholar. I don't ask, and he doesn't tell."

Eventually, Spindler planned to "come out" as a foreigner, but he had always been wary of the site's nationalism. And he remembered the way he felt after defending his thesis at Peking University. "My professor said, 'In the rules for foreigners, we usually give them a little more latitude,' " Spindler told me. "If I had had more presence of mind, I would have said, 'Well, I've been here for the experience, and I'll be happy to walk away without a degree.' " He continued, "I want my work to be evaluated on these stand-alone terms. Who it's written by, whether he's Chinese or foreign, shouldn't matter."

Because Spindler was worried that he wouldn't get the credit he deserved for his work, he published under a pseudonym—it seemed contradictory, like many of his actions. He was extremely cautious, but somehow he had risked everything—financial stability, relationships, personal safety—for his research. He had confidence in his ideas about the wall, and described them with perfect clarity, but he refused to start writing his book before the spreadsheets satisfied him. At times, it seemed quixotic—the single-minded pursuit of a strangely ambitious structure—but beneath it lay a deep commitment to rationality. He believed that the wall had been built for a military reason, and that he was researching it in the best way possible. He hated any symbolic use of the Great Wall, especially for something as complex as Chinese culture. For Chinese, the wall usually represents national glory, whereas foreigners often see it as evidence of xenophobia. Spindler believed that neither interpretation was useful. "It's just one manifestation of what China has done," he said. "It's just a way they defended themselves."

Of all the people I met, Hong Feng had a viewpoint that reminded me the most of Spindler's. Hong's online name is Shi Shu, which means "to reach the end of the books." "People in China always describe the Great Wall as a symbol of ethnic pride," Hong told me. "But that's an exaggeration. It wasn't supposed to be a great monument like the Pyramids. It was built in response to attacks."

At the end of December, I accompanied Spindler on his three-hundred-and-fortieth trip along the wall. During a previous visit to Miyun, north of the city, he'd seen some high ridges that he believed might contain towers of piled stone. Slowly, we climbed to the ridges: nothing. But it was another day to be checked off on the to-do list.

Although I had never liked the bushwhacking, during the past year I had come to appreciate the distinctive rhythm of the trips. Every journey had it all: good trails, bad trails, hellish thorns, spectacular views. No matter the landscape, I could always see Spindler up ahead, his white hat bobbing above the thickets.

On the way down, we found a dead roe deer in a trap. The loop snare had caught the animal around the neck; it must have strangled itself. Just beyond that, we reached a long section of wall where most ramparts had crumbled away. As I walked atop the structure, my boot got caught in a hole. I tripped and fell down a short ledge, pitching head first toward a ten-foot drop. Somehow—things happened very fast—I threw myself down against the wall. I slammed to a stop with my head peering over the edge.

"Nice save," Spindler said, after he had rushed over. I rose slowly, and tried to walk, and knew that my left knee was badly hurt. But we were miles from help, and the temperature was well below freezing; the only option was to keep moving.

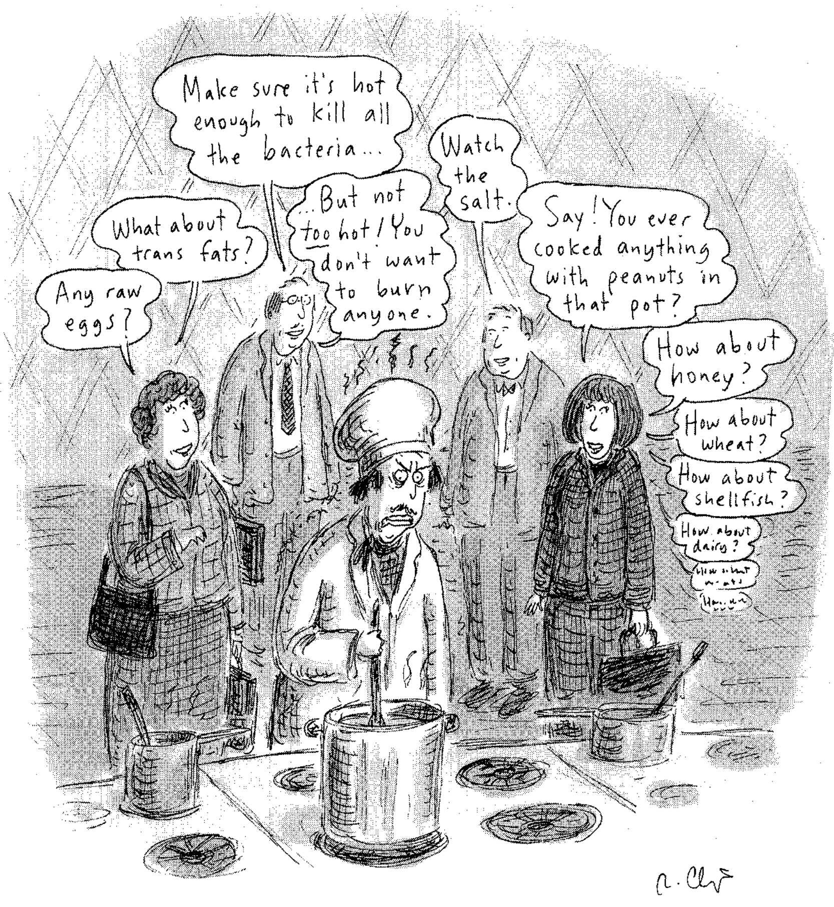
During the descent, I leaned on Spindler whenever possible. It took three hours, and I remember every minute. The next morning, I went to the hospital for X-rays. The doctor told me that I'd broken my kneecap and I'd be on crutches for six weeks; and that was the last time I walked on the Great Wall of China.

The day after the accident, Spindler stopped by my apartment. He asked if there was anything I needed, and I could tell that he felt bad about what had happened. He mentioned that he had made a quick analysis of the spreadsheets, which showed that mine was only the second casualty to be sustained in approximately twelve hundred and fifty person-days of hiking. Later, he confirmed that the exact figure was twelve hundred and forty-five.

In February, before leaving on a research trip to Taiwan, he visited me again. He planned to study some Ming maps and memorials that were held in Taipei's National Palace Museum. He still hadn't written anything in English, but additional Chinese articles were in the works, and he seemed to be thinking more about the future. He planned to start writing the book within a year or so; after it was finished, he'd find a way to continue researching the wall. Maybe he'd start a Ph.D. program, or perhaps he'd remain independent, supporting himself with lectures and books. "I'll need to learn other languages in order to get academics to give me the time of day," he said. "You really get written off if you don't know Japanese, if you don't know Mongolian. There are others that would be helpful. Probably the next one would be Russian, and possibly German. I guess it would be helpful to learn some Manchurian. A little Tibetan. But those are further down the list."

I hopped on crutches to the door and said goodbye. He had an early flight; in order to save money, he'd booked a ticket with a seven-hour layover in the Macao airport. When I'd asked how many Beijing hiking days were left, he didn't hesitate. "Eighty-six," he said. ♦

TOO MANY LAWYERS SPOIL THE BROTH


Make sure it's hot enough to kill all the bacteria...
Watch the salt.
What about trans fats?
...But not too hot! You don't want to burn anyone.
Say! You ever cooked anything with peanuts in that pot?
Any raw eggs?
How about honey?
How about wheat?
How about shellfish?
How about dairy?

FICTION

A BENEFICIARY

BY NADINE GORDIMER

Caches of old papers are like graves; you shouldn't open them.

Her mother had been cremated. There was no marble stone incised "Laila de Morne, born, died, actress."

She had always lied about her age; her name, too—the name she used wasn't her natal name, too ethnically limiting to suggest her uniqueness in a cast list. It wasn't her married name, either. She had baptized herself, professionally. She was long divorced, although only in her late fifties, when a taxi hit her car and (as she would have delivered her last line) brought down the curtain on her career.

Her daughter, Charlotte, had her father's surname and was as close to him as a child can be, when subject to an ex-husband's conditions of access. As Charlotte grew up, she felt more compatible with him than with her mother, fond as she was of her mother's—somehow—childishness. Perhaps acting was really a continuation of the make-believe games of childhood—fascinating, in a way. But. But what? Not a way Charlotte had wanted to follow—despite the fact that she was named after the character with which her mother had had an early success (Charlotte Corday, in Peter Weiss's "Marat/Sade"), and despite the encouragement of drama and dance classes. Not a way she could follow, because of lack of talent: her mother's unspoken interpretation, expressed in disappointment, if not reproach. Laila de Morne had not committed herself to any lover, had not gone so far as to marry again. There was no stepfather to confuse relations, loyalties; Charlie (as her father called her) could remark to him, "Why should she expect me to take after her?"

Her father was a neurologist. They laughed together at any predestinatory prerogative of her mother's, or the alternative paternal one—to be expected to become a doctor! Poking around in people's brains? They nudged each other with more laughter at the daughter's distaste.

Her father helped arrange the memorial gathering, in place of a funeral service, sensitive as always to any need of his daughter's. She certainly didn't expect or want him to come along to his ex-wife's apartment and sort the clothes, personal possessions to be kept or given away. A friend from the firm where she worked as an actuary agreed to help for a weekend. Unexpectedly, the young civil-rights lawyer with whom there had been a sensed mutual attraction, taken no further than dinner and a cinema date, also offered himself—perhaps a move toward the love affair that was coming anyway. The girls emptied the cupboards of clothes, the friend exclaiming over the elaborate range of styles women of that generation wore, how many personalities they could project—as if they had been able to choose, when now you belonged to the outfit of jeans and T-shirt. Oh, of course! Charlotte's mother was a famous actress!

Charlotte did not correct this, out of respect for her mother's ambitions. But when she went to the next room, where the lawyer was arranging chronologically the press cuttings and programs and photographs of Laila in the roles for which the wardrobe had provided, she turned over a few programs and remarked, more to be overheard by him than to him, "Never really had the leads she believed she should have had, after the glowing notices of her promise, very young. When she murdered Marat. In his bathtub, wasn't it? I've never seen the play." Confiding the truth of her mother's career, betraying Laila's idea of herself—perhaps also a move toward a love affair.

The three young people broke out of the trappings of the past for coffee and their concerns of the present. What sort of court cases does a civil-rights lawyer take on? What did he mean by "not the usual litigation"? No robberies or hijackings? Did the two young women feel that they were discriminated against? Did the plum jobs go to males? Or was it the other way around—did bad conscience over gender discrimination mean that women were now elevated to positions they weren't really up to? Women of any color, and black men—same thing? What would have been a sad and strange task for Charlotte alone became a lively evening, an animated exchange of opinions and experiences. Laila surely would not have disapproved; she had stimulated her audience.

There was a Sunday evening at a jazz club, sharing enthusiasm and a boredom with hip-hop, Kwaito. After another evening, dinner and dancing together—that first bodily contact to confirm attraction—he offered to help again with her task, and on a weekend afternoon they kissed and touched among the stacks of clothes and boxes of theatre souvenirs, his hand brimming with her breast, but did not proceed, as would have been natural, to the beautiful and inviting bed, with its signature of draped shawls and cushions. Some atavistic taboo, a notion of respect for the dead—as if her mother still lay there in possession.

The love affair found a bed elsewhere and continued uncertainly, pleasurably enough but without much expectation of commitment. A one-act piece begun among the props of a supporting-part career.

Charlotte brushed aside any offers, from him or from her office friend, to continue with the sorting of Laila's—what? The clothes were packed up. Some seemed wearable only in the context of a theatrical wardrobe and were given to an experimental-theatre group; others went to the Salvation Army, for distribution to the homeless. Her father arranged with an estate agent to advertise the apartment for sale; unless you want to move in, he suggested. But it was too big; Charlie couldn't afford to, didn't want to, live in a style not her own, even rent-free. They laughed again in their understanding, not in criticism of her mother. Laila was Laila. He agreed, but as if thinking of some other aspect of her. Yes, Laila.

The movers came to take the furniture to be sold. She half thought of inheriting the bed; it would have been luxurious to flop diagonally across its generosity, but she wouldn't have been able to get it past the bedroom door in her small flat. When the men departed with their loads, there were pale shapes on the floor where everything had stood. She opened windows to let out the dust and, turning back suddenly, saw that something had been left behind. A couple of empty boxes, the cardboard ones used for supermarket delivery. Irritated, she went to gather them. One wasn't empty; it seemed to be filled with letters. What makes you keep some letters and not others? In her own comparatively short life, she'd thrown away giggly schoolgirl stuff, sexy propositions scrib-

MIMI HADDON, "FEATHERED JACKET" (2006)

bled on the backs of menus, once naïvely found flattering, a polite letter of rejection in response to an application for a job beyond her qualifications—a salutary lesson on what her set called the *real world*. This box apparently contained memorabilia that was different from the stuff already dealt with. The envelopes had the look of personal letters: hand-addressed, without the printed logos of businesses, banks. Had Laila had a personal life that wasn't related to her family-the-theatre? One child, the product of divorced parents, hardly counts as "family."

Charlotte—that was the identity she had in any context relating to her mother—sifted through the envelopes. If her mother had had a personal life, it was not a material possession to be disposed of like garments taken on and off; a personal life can't be "left to" a daughter, like a beneficiary in a will. Whatever letters Laila had chosen to keep were still hers; best to quietly burn them, as Laila herself had been consumed, sending them to join her. They say (she had read somewhere) that no one ever disappears, up in the atmosphere, stratosphere, whatever you call space—atoms infinitely minute, beyond conception of existence, are up there forever, from the whole world, from all time. As she shook this one box which was not empty, so that the contents would settle and not spill when it was lifted, she noticed some loose sheets of writing paper lying face down. Not held in the privacy of an envelope. She picked them out, turned them face up. Her father's handwriting, more deliberately formed than Charlie knew it. What was the date at the top of the page, under the address of the house she remembered as home when she was a small girl? A date twenty-four years back. Of course, his handwriting had changed a bit; it does with different stages in one's life. His Charlie was twenty-eight now, so she would have been four years old when he wrote that date. It must have been just before the divorce and her move to a new home with Laila.

The letter was formally addressed, on the upper left-hand side of the paper, to a firm of lawyers, Kaplan McLeod & Partners, and directed to one of them in particular: "Dear Hamish." Why on earth would Laila want to keep from a dead marriage the sort of business letter that a neurologist might have to write to a legal firm—on some question of a car accident maybe, or the nonpayment of some patient's consultation fee or surgery charges. (As if her father's medical and human ethics would ever have led him to the latter. . . .) The pages must have got mixed up with the other, truly personal material at some time. Laila and Charlotte had changed apartments frequently during Charlotte's childhood and adolescence.

The letter was marked "Copy":

"My wife, Laila de Morne, is an actress and, in the course of pursuing her career, has moved in a circle independent of one shared by a couple in marriage. I have always encouraged her to take the opportunities, through contacts she might make, to further her talent. She is a very attractive woman, and it was obvious to me that I should have to accept that there would be men, certainly among her fellow-actors, who would want to be more than admirers. But while she enjoyed the attention, and sometimes responded with a general kind of social flirtation, I had no reason to see this as a more than natural pleasure in her own looks and talents. She would make fun of these admirers, privately, with sharp remarks on their appearance, their pretensions, and, if they were actors, directors, or playwrights, on the quality of their work. I knew that I had not married a woman who would want to stay home and nurse babies, but from time to time she would bring up the subject. We ought to have a son, she said, for me. Then she would get a new part in a play and the idea was understandably postponed. After a successful start, her career was, however, not advancing to her expectations. She did not succeed in getting several roles that she had confidently anticipated. She came home elated one night and told me that she had been accepted for a small part in a play overseas, in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. She had been selected because the leading actor himself, Rendall Harris, had told the casting director that she was the most talented of the young women in the theatre group. I was happy for her, and we gave a farewell party at our house the night before the cast left for the United Kingdom. After Edinburgh, she spent some time in London, calling to say how wonderful and necessary it was for her to experience what was happening in theatre there and, I gathered, trying her luck in auditions. Apparently unsuccessfully.

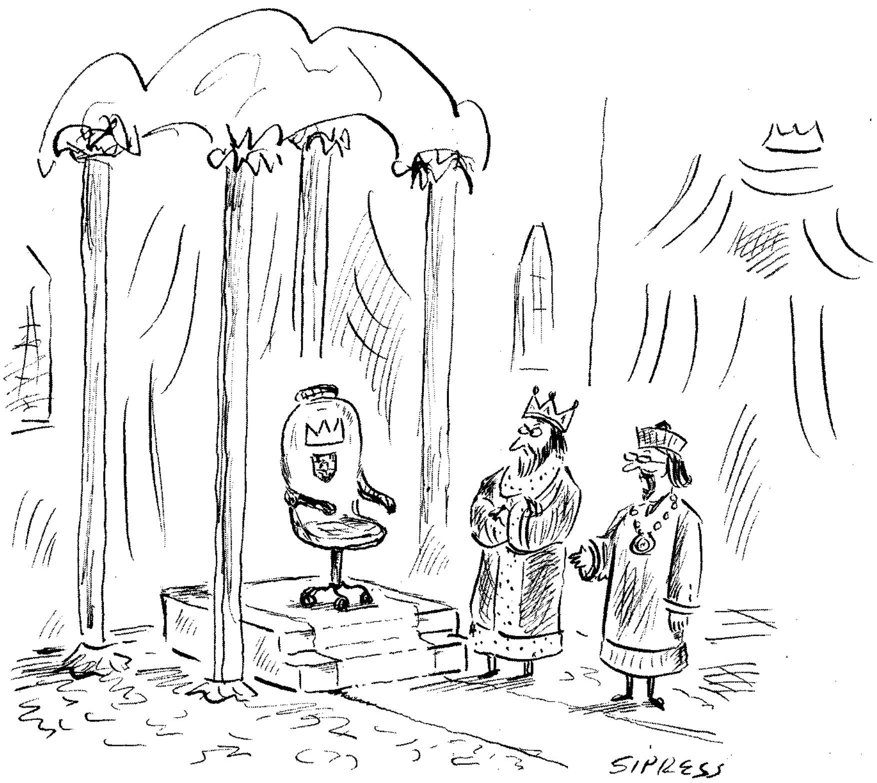
"Perhaps she intended not to come back. But she did. A few weeks later, she told me that she had just been to a gynecologist and confirmed that she was pregnant. I was moved. I took the unlikely luck of conception—I'd assumed, when we made love on the night of the party, that she'd taken the usual precautions; we weren't drunk, even if she was triumphant—as a symbol of what would be a change in our perhaps unsuitable marriage. I am a medical specialist, a neurological surgeon.

"When the child was born, it looked like any other red-faced infant, but after several months everyone remarked how the little girl was the image of Laila, her mother. It was one Saturday afternoon, when she was kicking and flinging her arms athletically—we were admiring our baby's progress, her beauty, and I joked, 'Lucky she doesn't look like me'—that my wife picked her up, away from me, and told me, 'She's not your child.' She'd met someone in Edinburgh. I interrupted with angry questions. No, she prevaricated, all right, London, the affair began in London. The leading actor who had insisted on her playing the small part had introduced her to someone there. A few days later, she admitted that it was not "someone," it was the leading actor. He was the father of our girl. She told this to other people, our friends, when through the press we heard the news that the actor, Rendall Harris, was making a name for himself in plays by Tom Stoppard and Tennessee Williams.

"I couldn't decide what to believe. I even consulted a colleague in the medical profession about the possible variations in the period of gestation in relation to birth. Apparently, it was possible that the conception had taken place with me, or with the other man a few days before or after the intercourse with me. Laila never expressed any intention of taking the child and making her life with the man. She was too proud to let anyone know that he most likely wouldn't want her or the supposed progeny of their affair.

"Laila has devoted herself to her acting career and, as a result, I have of necessity had a closer relation than is customary for the father with the care of the small girl, now four years old. I am devoted to her and can produce witnesses to support the conviction that she would be happiest in my custody.

"I hope this is adequate. Let me know if anything more is needed, or if there is too much detail here. I'm accustomed to writing reports in medical jargon and thought that this should be different. I don't suppose I've a hope in hell of getting Charlie; Laila will put all her dramatic skills into swearing that she isn't mine!"



"It may not be resplendent, Your Highness, but it's totally ergonomic."

That Saturday: it landed in the apartment looted by the present and filled it with blasting amazement, the presence of the past. That Saturday, coming to her just as it had come to him. Charlotte/Charlie (which was she?) received exactly as he had what Laila (yes, her mother—giving birth is proof) had told.

How do you recognize something that is not in the known vocabulary of your emotions? Shock is like a ringing in the ears; to stop it, you snatch back to the first page, read the letter again. It says what it said. This sinking collapse from within, from your flared, breathless nostrils down to your breasts, stomach, legs, and hands, hands that not only feel passively but go out to grasp what can't be. Dismay, that feeble-sounding word, has this ghastly meaning. What do you do with something you've been *told*? Something that now is there in the gut of your existence. Run to him? Thrust his letter at him, at her—but she's out of it now, she has escaped in smoke from the crematorium. And she is the one who really knows—knew.

Of course, he didn't get custody. He was awarded the divorce, but the mother was given the four-year-old child. It is natural, particularly in the case of a small girl, for a child to live with the mother. Despite this "deposition" of his, in which he was denied paternity, he paid maintenance for the child. The expensive boarding school, the drama and dance classes, even those holidays in the Seychelles, three times in Spain, once in France, once in Greece, with the mother. Must have paid generously. He was a neurologist, more successful in his profession than the mother was on the stage. But this couldn't have been the reason for the generosity.

Charlotte/Charlie couldn't think about that, either. She folded the two sheets, fumbled absently for the envelope they should have been in, weren't, and with them in her hand left the boxes, the letters, Laila's apartment locked, behind the door.

He could only be asked: why he had been a father, loving.

The return of his Saturday—it woke her at three, four in the morning, when she had kept it at bay through the activities of the day, work, navigating alone in her car through the city's crush, leisure time occupied in the company of friends who hadn't been *told*. She and her father had one of their regular early dinners at his favorite restaurant, went to a foreign movie by a director whose work she admires, and the news of that Saturday couldn't be spoken, was unreal.

In the dark, when the late-night traffic was over and the dawn traffic hadn't begun: silence.

The reason.

He believed in the chance of conception, that one night of the party. Laila's farewell. Even though his friend, the expert in biological medicine, had implied that if you didn't know the stage of the woman's fertility cycle you couldn't be sure—the conception might have been achieved a few days before or after that unique night.

I am Charlie, his.

The reason.

Another night thought, an angry mood: Who do they think they are, deciding who I am to suit themselves? To suit her vanity—she could, at least, bear the child of an actor with a career in the theatre that she hadn't attained for herself. To suit his wounded macho pride—refusing to accept another male's potency; his seed had to have been the winner.

And in the morning, before the distractions of the day took over, shame, ashamed of herself, Charlie, for thinking so spitefully, cheaply about him.

The next reason that offered itself was hardly less unjust—confusedly hurtful to her. He had paid one kind of maintenance, and he had paid another kind of maintenance, loving her in order to uphold the conventions before what he saw as the world—the respectable doctors in white coats who had wives to accompany them to medical-council dinners. If he had married again, it would have been to a woman like these. Laila was Laila. Never risk another.

The letter that belonged to no one's daughter was moved from place to place, to a drawer under sweaters, to an Indian box where she kept earrings and bracelets, behind books of plays—Euripides and Racine, Shaw and Brecht, Dario Fo, Miller, Artaud, Beckett, and, of course, an annotated "Marat/Sade." Charlotte's inheritance, never read.

When you are of many minds, the contention makes someone who has been not exactly what one wanted, who doesn't yet count, the only person to be *told*. In bed, yet another night, after lovemaking, when the guards were down, along with the physical tensions. Mark, the civil-rights lawyer, who acted in the mess of divorce litigation only when it infringed constitutional rights, said, in response, of the letter, "Tear it up." When she appealed (it was not just a piece of paper): "Have a DNA test." How to do that without taking the whole cache that was the past to the father? "Get a snip of his hair." All that would be needed to go along with a sample of her blood. Like whoever it was in the Bible cutting off Samson's hair. But how was she supposed to do that? Steal up on her father in his sleep somewhere?

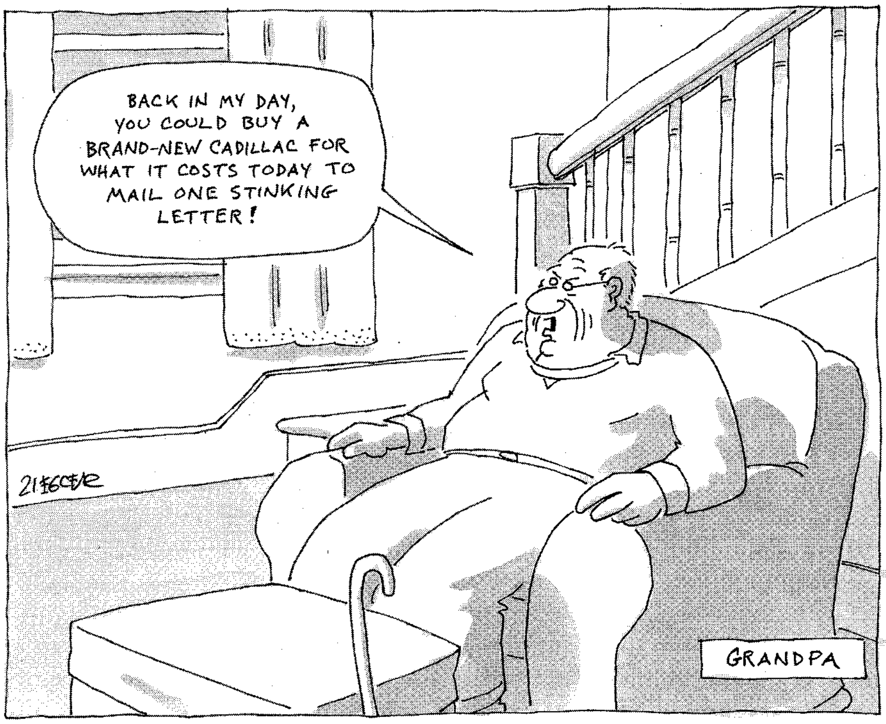
Tear it up. Easy advice from someone who had understood nothing. She did not.

But a circumstance came about, as if somehow summoned. . . . Of course, it was fortuitous. . . . A distinguished actor-director had been invited by a local theatre to direct a season of classical and avant-garde plays, taking several lead roles himself. It was his first return to the country, to the city where he was born and which he had left to pursue his career—he said in newspaper interviews and on radio, television—how long ago? Oh, twenty-five years. Rendall Harris. Newspaper photographs: an actor's expression, assumed for many cameras, handsomely enough late-middle-aged, a defiant slight twist to the mouth to emphasize character, the eyebrows raised together amusedly, a touch of white in the short sideburns. Eyes difficult to make out in newsprint. On television, alive; something of the upper body, gestures, coming into view, the closeup of his changing expressions, the deep-set long eyes, gray darkening with some deliberate intensity, almost flashing black, meeting yours, the viewer's. What had she expected? A recognition? Hers of him? His, out of the lit-up box, of her? An actor's performance face.

She couldn't ignore the stir at the idea that the man named by her mother was in the city. Laila was Laila. Yes. If she had not gone up in smoke, would he have met her again, remembered her? Had he ever seen the baby, who was at least two when he went off for twenty-five years? What does a two-year-old remember? Had she ever seen this man as a younger self, been taken in by those strikingly interrogative eyes, received?

She was accustomed to going to the theatre with friends or with the lawyer-lover, though he preferred films, one of his limited tastes that she could at least share. Every day—every night—she thought about the theatre. Not with Mark. Not beside any of her friends. No. In a wild recurrent impulse, there was the temptation to be there with her father, who did not know that she knew, had been *told*, as he was that Saturday. Laila was Laila. For him and for her.

She went alone when Rendall Harris was to play one of the lead roles. There had been ecstatic notices. He was Laurence Olivier reincarnated for a new—the twenty-first—century, a deconstructed style of performance. She was far back in the box-office queue when a board went up: "House Full." She booked online for another night, an aisle seat three rows from the proscenium. At the theatre, she found herself, for some reason, hostile. Ridiculous. She wanted to disagree with the critics. That's what it was about.


BACK IN MY DAY, YOU COULD BUY A BRAND-NEW CADILLAC FOR WHAT IT COSTS TODAY TO MAIL ONE STINKING LETTER!
ZIEGLER
GRANDPA

Rendall Harris—how do you describe a performance that manages to create for the audience the wholeness, the life of a man, not just "in character" for the duration of the play but what he might have been before the events chosen by the playwright and how he might be, alive, continuing after? Rendall Harris was an extraordinary actor, man. Her palms were up among the hands applauding like the flight of birds rising. When he came out to take the calls, summoning the rest of the cast around him, she wasn't in his direct sight line, as she would have been if she'd asked for a seat in the middle of the row.

She went to every performance in which he was billed in the cast. A seat in the middle of the second row; the first would have been too obvious.

Though she was something other than a groupie, she was among the knot of autograph-seekers one night, who hung about the foyer hoping that he might leave the theatre that way. He did appear, making for the bar with the theatre's director, and for a moment, under the arrest of programs thrust at him, happened to encounter her eyes as she stood back from his fans—he had a smile of self-deprecating amusement, meant for anyone in his line of vision, but that one was her.

The lift of his face, his walk, his repertoire of gestures, the oddities of his lapses in expression onstage that she secretly recognized as himself appearing, became almost familiar to her. As if she somehow knew him, and these intimacies knew her. Signals. If invented, they were very like conviction. At the box office, there was the routine question, "D'you have a season ticket?" She supposed that was to have been bought when the Rendall Harris engagement was first announced.

She thought of a letter. Owed it to him for the impression that his performances had made on her. His command of the drama of *living*, the excitement of being there with him. After the fourth or fifth version in her mind, the next was written. Mailed to the theatre, it was most likely glanced through in his dressing room or at his hotel, among the other "tributes," and would either be forgotten or taken back to London for the collection of memorabilia it seemed actors needed. But, with him, there was that wry sideways tilt to the photographed mouth.

Of course, she neither expected nor received any acknowledgment.

After a performance one night, she bumped into some old friends of Laila's, actors who had come to the memorial, and who insisted on her joining them in the bar. When Rendall Harris's unmistakable head appeared through the late crowd, they created a swift current past backs to embrace him, to draw him with their buddy, the theatre director, to a space made at the table, where she had been left among the bottles and glasses. The friends, in the excitement of having Rendall Harris among them, forgot to introduce her as Laila's daughter, Laila who'd played Corday in that early production where he'd been Marat; perhaps they had forgotten Laila—best thing with the dead if you want to get on with your life and ignore the hazards, like that killer taxi, around you. Charlotte's letter was no more present than the other one, behind the volumes of plays. A fresh acquaintance, just the meeting of a nobody with the famous. But not entirely, even from the famous actor's side. As the talk lobbed back and forth, the man, sitting almost opposite her, thought it friendly, from his special level of presence, to toss something to the young woman whom no one was including, and easily found what came to mind: "Aren't you the one who's been sitting bang in the middle of the second row, several times lately?" And then they joined in laughter, a double confession—hers of absorbed concentration on him; his of being aware of it or at least becoming so at the sight, here, of someone out there whose attention had caught him. He asked, across the voices of the others, which plays in the repertoire she'd enjoyed most, what criticisms she had of those she didn't think much of. He named a number that she hadn't seen. Her response was another confession: she had seen only those in which he had played a part.

When the party broke up and all were meandering their way, with stops and starts in backchat and laughter, to the foyer, a shift in progress brought Rendall Harris's back right in front of her. He turned swiftly, as lithely as a young man, and—it must have been impulse in one accustomed to being natural, charming, in spite of his professional guard—spoke as if he had been thinking of it: "You've missed a lot, you know, so flattering for me, avoiding the other plays. Come some night, or there's a Sunday-afternoon performance of a Wole Soyinka you ought to see. We'll have a bite in the restaurant before I take you to your favorite seat. I'm particularly interested in audience reaction to the chances I've taken directing this play."

Rendall Harris sat beside her through

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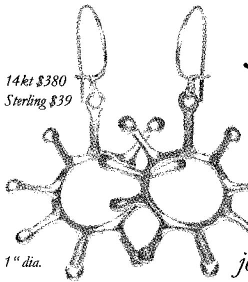

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the performance, now and then whispering some comment, drawing her attention to this and that. She had told him, over lasagna at lunch, that she was an actuary, a creature of calculation, that she couldn't be less qualified to judge the art of actors' interpretation or that of a director. "You know that's not true." Said with serious inattention. Tempting to believe that he sensed something in her blood, sensibility. From her mother. It was or was not the moment to tell him that she was Laila's daughter, although she carried Laila's husband's name, a name that Laila was not known by.

Now, what sort of a conundrum was that supposed to be? She was produced by—what was that long term?—parthenogenesis. She just growed, like Topsy? You know that's not true.

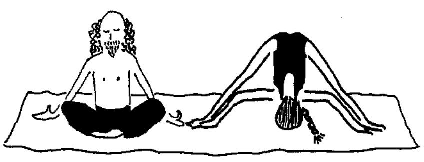
He arranged for her a seat as his guest for the rest of the repertoire in which he played the lead. It was taken for granted that she would come backstage afterward. Sometimes he included her in other cast gatherings, with "people your own age," obliquely acknowledging his own, old enough to be her father. Cool. He apparently had no children, adult or otherwise, didn't mention any. Was he gay? Now? Can a man change sexual preference, or literally embrace both? The way he embraced so startlingly, electric with the voltage of life, the beings created only in words by Shakespeare, Strindberg, Brecht, Beckett—oh, you name them, from the volumes holding down the letter telling of that Saturday. "You seem to understand that I—we—actors absolutely risk, kill ourselves, trying to reach the ultimate identity in what's known as a character, beating ourselves down to let the creation take over. Haven't you ever wanted to have a go yourself? Thought about acting?"

She said, "I know an actuary is the absolute antithesis of all that. I don't have the talent."

He didn't make some comforting effort. Didn't encourage magnanimously—*Why not have a go*? "Maybe you're right. Nothing like the failure of an actor. It isn't like other kinds of failure. It doesn't just happen inside you; it happens before an audience. Better to be yourself. You're a very interesting young woman, depths there. I don't know if you know it, but I think you do."

Like every sexually attractive young woman, she was experienced with the mostly pathetic drive that aging men have toward young women. Some of the men are themselves attractive, either because they have somehow kept the promise of vigor—mouths filled with their own teeth, tight muscular buttocks in their jeans, no jowls, fine eyes that have seen much to impart—or because they're well known, distinguished, yes, even rich. This actor, whose enduring male beauty was an attribute of his talent—he was probably more desirable now than he had been as a novice Marat in Peter Weiss's play; all the roles he had taken—he had emerged from the risk with a strongly endowed identity. Although there was no apparent reason that he should not make the usual play for this young woman, there was no sign that he was doing so. She knew the moves; they were not being made.

The attention was something else. Between them. Was this a question or a fact? They wouldn't know, would they? He simply welcomed her like a breeze that blew in with this season abroad, in his old home town, and seemed to refresh him. Famous people have protégés, a customary part of the multiply responsive public reception. He told her, sure to be indulged, that he wanted to go back to an adventure, a part of the country he'd been thrilled by as a child, wanted to climb there, where there were great spiky plants with red candelabras. She told him that it was the wrong season—those plants wouldn't be in bloom in this, his kind of season—but she'd drive him there; he took up the shy offer at once, and left the cast without him for two days, when the plays performed were not those in which he had the lead. They slipped and scrambled up the peaks he remembered, and, at the lodge in the evening, he was recognized, took this as inevitable, autographed bits of paper, and quipped privately with her that he had been mistaken in the past for a pop star he hadn't heard of but ought to have. His unconscious vitality invigorated people around him wherever he was. No wonder he was such an innovative director; the critics wrote that in his hands the classic plays, even the standbys of Greek drama, were reimagined, as if this were the way they were meant to be and never had been before. It wasn't in his shadow that she stood but in his light. As if she had been reimagined by herself. He was wittily critical at other people's expense, and so with him she was free to think—say—what she found ponderous in those she worked with: the predictability among her set of friends, which she usually tolerated without stirring them up. Not that she saw much of her friends at present. She was part of the cast of the backstage scene now, a recruit to the family of actors in the coffee shop at lunch, privy to their gossip, their bantering with the actor-director who drew so much from them, rousing their eager talent.



The regular Charlie dinners with her father, often postponed, were subdued; he caught this from her. There wasn't much for them to talk about. Unless she wanted to show off her new associations.

The old impulse came, unwelcome, to go with her father to the theatre. Suppressed. But returned. To sit with him and together see the man commanding on the stage. What for? What would this resolve? Was she Charlotte or Charlie?

Charlie said, "Let's see the play that's had such rave reviews. I'll get tickets." He didn't demur, had perhaps forgotten who Rendall Harris was, might be.

He led her to the bar afterward, talking of the play with considering interest. He had not seen Beckett in ages; the play wore well, was not outdated. She didn't want to be there. It was late, she said. No, no, she didn't want a drink, the bar was too crowded. But he persuaded gently, "We won't stay. I'm thirsty, need a beer."

The leading actor was caught in a spatter of applause as he moved among the admiring drinkers. He talked through clusters of others and then arrived.

"Rendall, my father."

"Congratulations. Wonderful performance—the critics don't exaggerate."

The actor dismissed the praise as if he'd had enough of that from people who didn't understand what such an interpretation of Vladimir or Estragon involved, the—what was that word he always used?—risk. "I didn't feel right tonight. I was missing a beat. Charlotte, you've seen me do better, hey, m'darling."

Her father picked up his glass but didn't drink. "Last time I saw you was in the play set in an asylum. Laila de Morne was Charlotte Corday."

Her father *told.*

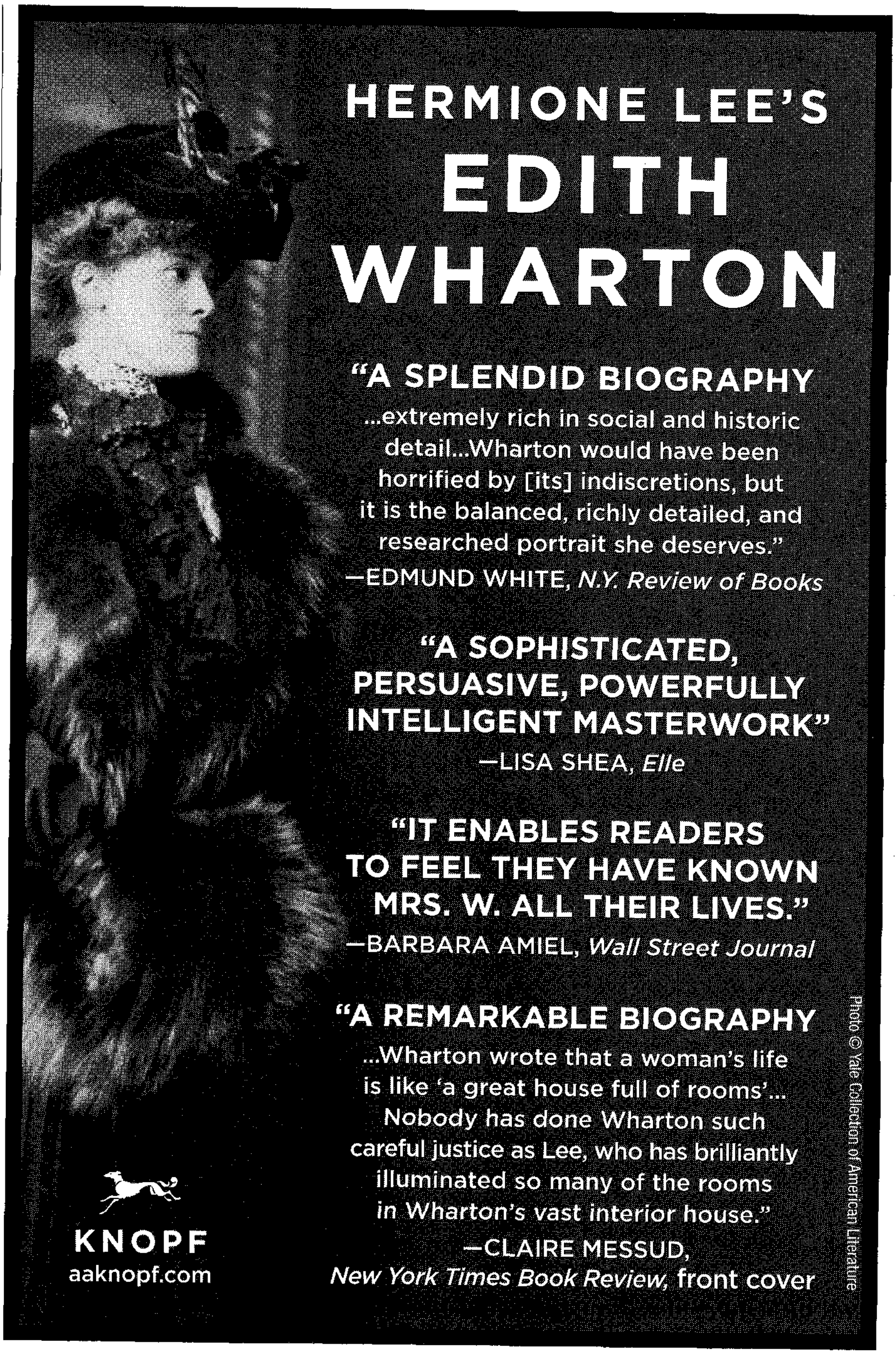
"Of course, you always get chalked up in the critics' hierarchy by how you play the classics, but I'm more fascinated by the new stuff—movement theatre, parts I can take from zero. I've sat in that bathtub too many times, knifed by Charlotte Cordays. . . ." The projection of that disarmingly self-deprecating laugh.

She spoke what she had not *told*, had not yet found the right time and situation to say to him: "Laila de Morne is my mother." No more to be discarded in the past tense than the performance of the de Sade asylum where she had been Charlotte Corday to his Marat. "That's how I was named."

"Well, you're sure not a Charlotte to carry a knife, spoil your beautiful aura with that, frighten off the men around you." Peaked eyebrows, as if he were, ruefully, one of them—a trick from the actors' repertoire contradicted by a momentary, hardly perceptible contact of those eyes with her own, diamonds, black with the intensity that it was his talent to summon, a stage prop taken up and at once released, at will.

Laila was Laila.

When they were silent in the pause at a traffic light, her father touched the open shield of his palm to the back of her head, the unobtrusive caress he had offered when driving her to boarding school. If she was, for her own reasons, now differently disturbed, that was not to be pried at. She was meant to drop him at his apartment, but when she drew up at the entrance she opened the car door at her side, as he did his, and went to him in the street. He turned—what's the matter? She moved her head—nothing. She went to him and he saw, without understanding, that he should take her in his arms. She held him. He kissed her cheek, and she pressed it against his. Nothing to do with DNA. ♦



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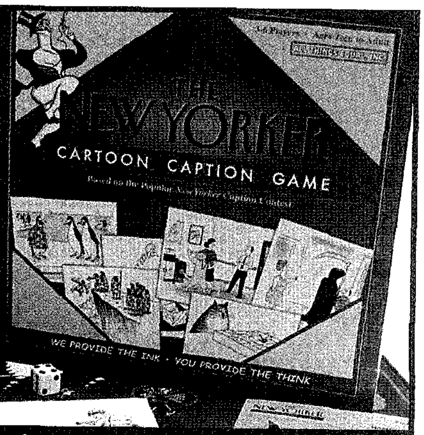

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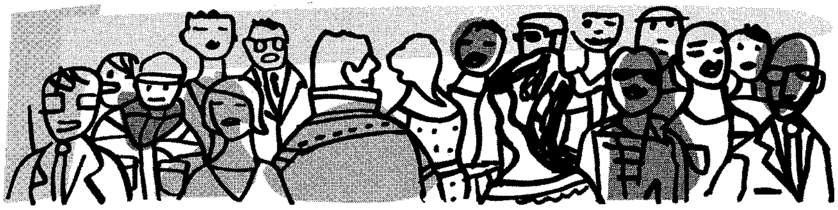


MUSICAL EVENTS

UNDERWORLD

"Orfeo ed Euridice" and "Il Trittico" at the Met.

BY ALEX ROSS

On a recent Saturday morning, I drove out to Moosic, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Scranton, to see the Metropolitan Opera. The detour was necessitated by a venture that Peter Gelb has launched in his first season as the general manager of the Met: a series of live, high-definition broadcasts of Saturday-matinée performances, shown at movie theatres across the country. The idea sounded a little daft when it was announced last year: how could a nearly four-hour-long showing of Puccini's "Il Trittico" compete with the likes of "Disturbia" at a suburban multiplex? In fact, Theatre 1 at the Cinemark 20 in Moosic was mostly full, and a similarly robust crowd watched the same transmission in Theatre 2, next door. Out of curiosity, I poked my head into a theatre showing "Disturbia"; it was half empty. So it has gone with the H.D. broadcasts all season: each weekend they have been shown, they have consistently counted among the twenty highest-grossing films in America, and have often bested Hollywood's proudest blockbusters on a per-screen, per-day average. Such figures are a timely slap in the face to media companies that have written off classical music as an art with no mass appeal.

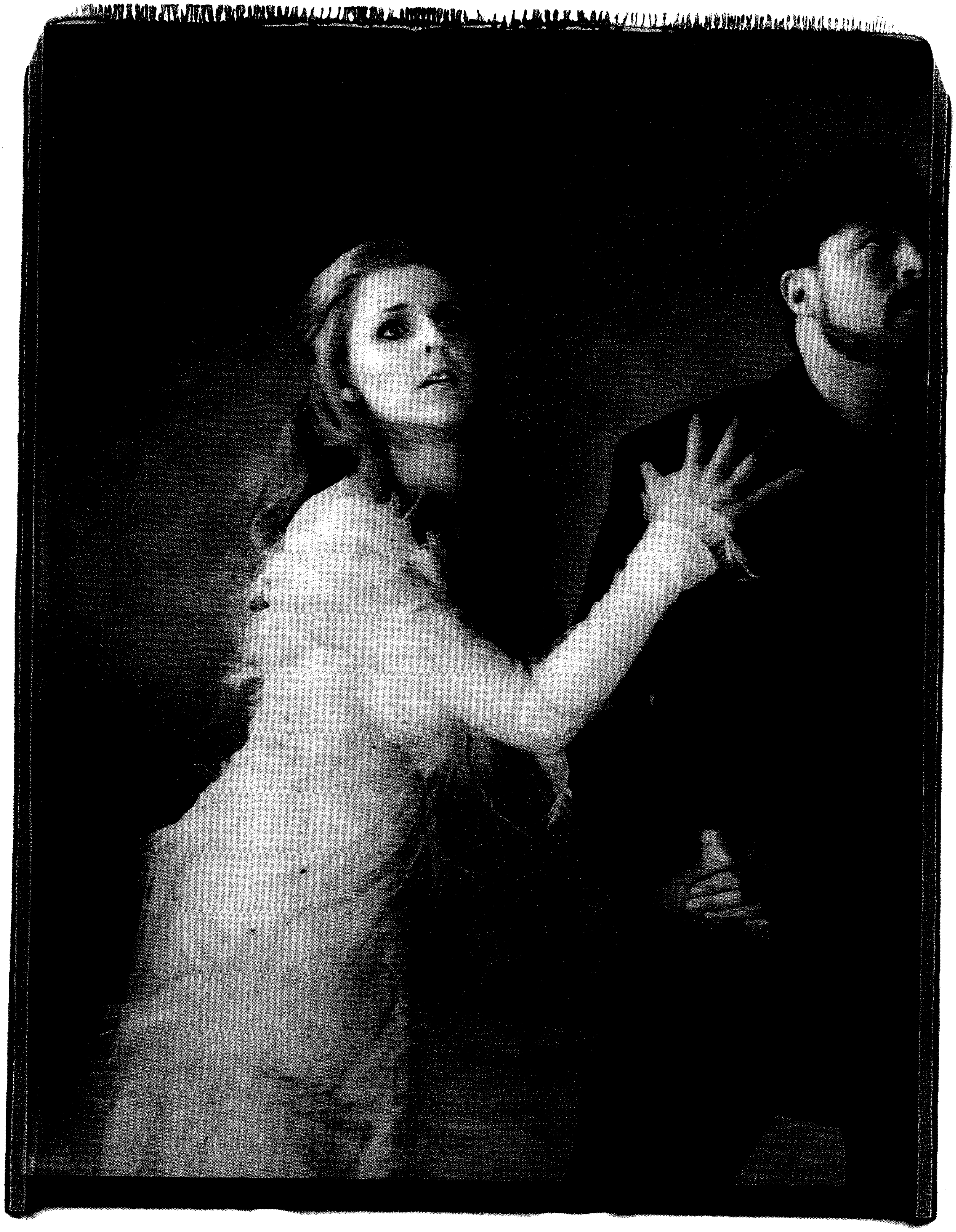
The broadcasts have thrived, in part, because they are exceptionally well produced. Nothing can replace the thrill of unamplified voices filling a room, but adroit camerawork can improve upon the less felicitous imaginings of opera directors. The recent "Il Trittico," which was directed in big-budget Broadway style by Jack O'Brien, with sets by Douglas Schmidt, created an imposing look for each of the installments in Puccini's trilogy—an early-twentieth-century Parisian canal for "Il Tabarro," a luminously ancient nunnery for "Suor Angelica," a cobwebbed Florentine palace for "Gianni Schicchi"—but it lacked intimacy and dramatic focus onstage. In the movie theatre, with closeups, tracking shots, and other cinematic tricks, it had more punch, and touches that had initially struck me as campy (the apparition of Sister Angelica's dead child, for instance) went down better with popcorn and soda. The sound was generally fine, lacking the bass bloat that ruins orchestral movie scores these days. And the intermissions were filled with sprightly features: backstage tours, a talk between O'Brien and James Levine, and a mini-documentary on the Met's National Council Auditions, for young singers around the country ("I'm going to New York!" the forceful baritone Ryan McKinny exclaimed into his cell phone, à la "American Idol").

No sooner did the H.D. phenomenon take off than opera traditionalists started worrying that the technology would distort musical values. They have forecast a dire era of photographable faces and forgettable voices mixed with outbreaks of crossover kitsch. The danger certainly exists—music lovers have not forgotten that when Gelb ran the Sony Classical label he blemished the universe with James Horner's "Titanic" soundtrack—but I'm guessing that the broadcasts will ultimately favor singers who can sing and act, rather than those who simply look good on posters. The standout member of the "Trittico" cast, both in the house and at the movies, was Stephanie Blythe, a not quite svelte woman who commands attention with the clarion beauty of her voice and the blunt intensity of her presence. If, as rumor has it, some Met veterans are investing in plastic surgery and crash diets, they'd do better to buy acting lessons.

Whatever missteps and controversies await Gelb, he has had a remarkably successful first season. Attendance has been up (the entire last week of performances in May sold out); crowds are more diverse in age; future plans for casting and repertory seem sound. To the blinking astonishment of a lot of people in the music field, the Met administration has thrown off its deep-seated caution and adopted the mentality of a scrappy newcomer. With Gerard Mortier, the scandal-making European intendant, set to take over City Opera, New York opera seems set to enter an anything-goes era, and the disasters may be as entertaining as the triumphs.

One point of tension in the approaching Met-City Opera showdown may be this: who will get Mark Morris? In the late eighties, Mortier, while running the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, in Brussels, gave Morris the chance to create his first great works of voice-and-dance theatre, "L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato" and "Dido and Aeneas." In 2000, City Opera presented his production of Rameau's "Platée." Yet Morris just made his début at the Met, directing Gluck's "Orfeo ed Euridice," and the response was sufficiently delirious so that he'll presumably want to return.

"Orfeo," first heard in 1762 and performed at the Met in its original version, is enshrined in history as the original "reform opera," with ornate conventions of the Baroque era giving way to Classical simplicity and stir-



Maija Kovalevska and David Daniels play the lovers in Gluck's "Orfeo ed Euridice." Photograph by Mary Ellen Mark.

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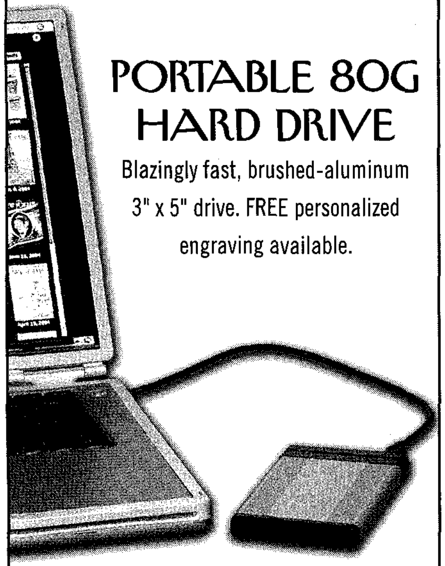

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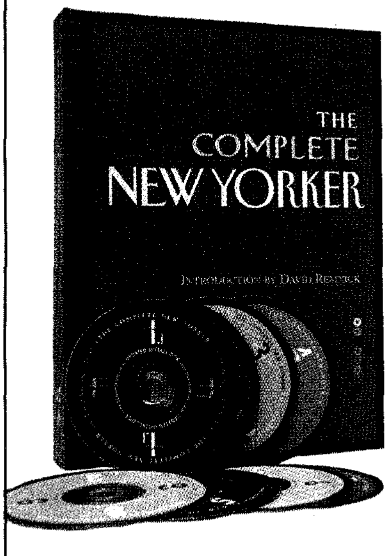

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rings of Romantic angst. Then again, with choruses of shepherds and nymphs lamenting on behalf of the tragic Orpheus and the figure of Amor zipping in to tack on a happy ending, "Orfeo" remains a rather Baroque contraption. And Morris—an artist who sways effortlessly and enthusiastically between the high and the low, the earthy and the airy, the goofy and the grand—is in many ways the ideal Baroque director; he practically embodies the aesthetic.

The action unfolds in front of simple, severe, handsome sets by Allen Moyer: steeply raked amphitheatre seating for the chorus of the dead; an enormous fire-escape-style metal staircase for Orpheus' descent to the underworld; a gauzy gray cavern for the lovers' climactic scene in the "tortuous labyrinth." These monumental spaces are alternately chilled and warmed by James Ingalls's emotionally precise lighting and humanized by Isaac Mizrahi's vivid costumes: roughly contemporary garb for the principals and the dancers (Orpheus looks a bit like Johnny Cash, with a guitar slung behind him), multiperiod garb for the chorus. When you notice a tall, thin bass wearing a top hat and sporting a beard, you realize that all hundred singers have been made to resemble famous people of the past, from Cleopatra to Henry VIII and on to Lincoln, Gandhi, and Jackie O. The concept risks cuteness but achieves pathos: celebrities are apparently doomed to spend eternity in a V.I.P. area designed by Richard Serra.

Morris's choreography was executed by members of the Mark Morris Dance Group, along with four men from the Met's ballet corps. In the opening scenes, the dancers move with a kind of constricted desperation, more with the upper body than with the feet and legs, tracing out gestures of supplication and lamentation. Later, when Orpheus retrieves Eurydice from the Elysian Fields, the dancing grows disciplined and exuberant. In a hyper-elegant ring dance that accompanies Orpheus' aria "Che puro ciel," legs move to pizzicato bass, while arms ride the up-and-down murmur of arpeggios; the circle reverses direction just before the mode changes to minor, and stops when the harmony pauses on an expectant dominant seventh. Once again, Morris accomplishes the feat of making the score itself seem to dance before one's eyes.

The role of Orpheus was originally to have been sung by the late mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, to whose memory the performances were dedicated. The countertenor David Daniels had no hope of matching Lieberson's emotional directness, and he sometimes sounded strained against the rich, intermittently overripe sound that James Levine drew from the orchestra. But he delivered a darkly affecting account of the central aria, "Che farò." The young Latvian soprano Maija Kovalevska as Eurydice showed off her buttery, room-filling, emotionally pointed voice; Heidi Grant Murphy made for an aggressively charming Amor, at one point maintaining pitch while being dangled fifty feet in the air. Perhaps the best singing of the night came from the chorus, which has been transformed under the direction of Donald Palumbo, its new chorus master. A group that had fallen into some lazy routines is markedly more focussed in pitch, unified in phrasing, and intense in feeling. It should strike terror into the multiplexes next season when it channels the mob violence of Britten's "Peter Grimes."

Credit for commissioning this vibrant "Orfeo" goes to Joseph Volpe, Gelb's predecessor, but it neatly fits the philosophy of theatre-savvy opera that the new general manager has announced for the house. Can the Met possibly become a place where theatrical values match musical ones? The sequel arrives in theatres next fall. ♦

EVENTS WE DIDN'T ATTEND

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BOOKS

ATHEISTS WITH ATTITUDE

Why do they hate Him?

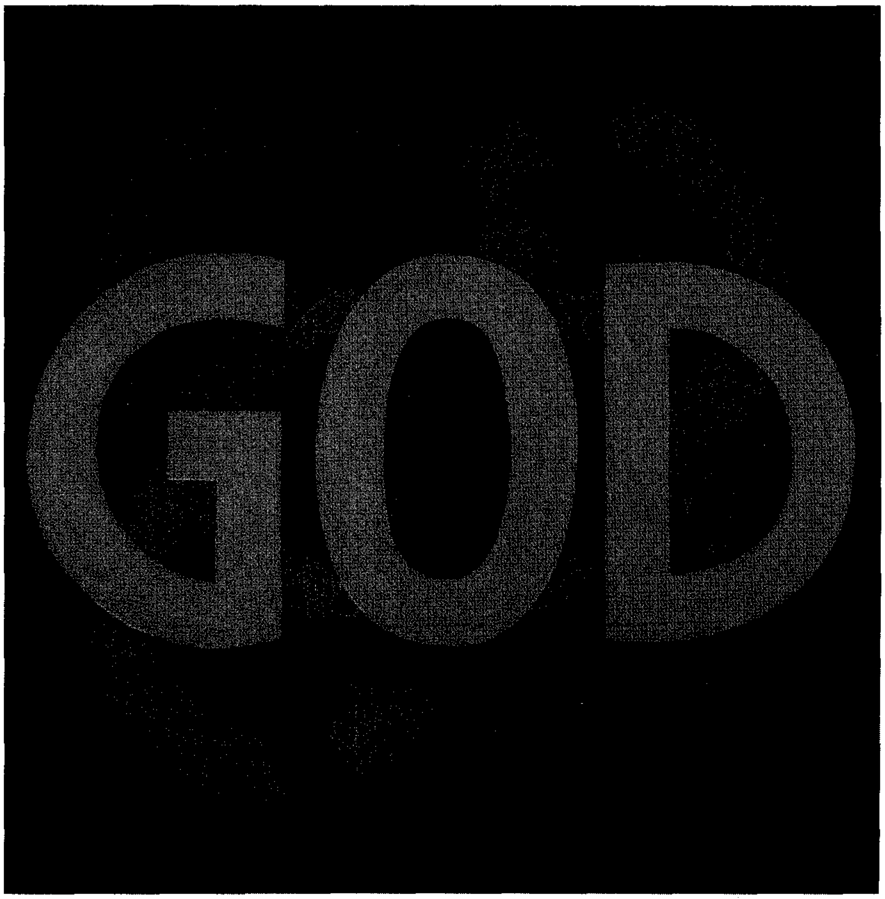
BY ANTHONY GOTTLIEB

Great portents and disasters turn some minds to God and others away from him. When an unusually bright and long-tailed comet was tracked through the sky in the last two months of 1680, posters and sermons called on Christians to repent. A hen in Rome seemed to confirm that the Day of Judgment was near. On December 2nd, it made an extraordinarily loud cackle and produced an exceptionally large egg, on which could be seen a likeness of the comet, or so it was said. This added to the religious panic. But the comet also sparked a small triumph for rationalism. In the next few years, as Armageddon somehow failed to arrive, a stream of pamphlets across Europe and America argued that heavenly displays were purely natural phenomena. The skeptics won the day. From the eighteenth century onward, no respectable intellectual saw comets as direct messages from God—though there were still some fears that one might eventually hit the earth.

The felling of the World Trade Center in New York, on September 11, 2001, brought its share of religion. Two populist preachers, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, called it divine punishment (though both quickly withdrew their remarks), and not only the bereaved prayed for help. But September 11th and its aftershocks in Bali, Madrid, London, and elsewhere are more notable for causing an outbreak of militant atheism, at least on bookshelves. The terrorist attacks were carried out in the name of Islam, and they have been taken, by a string of best-selling books, to illustrate the fatal dangers of all religious faith.

The first of these books was "The End of Faith," by Sam Harris, which was published in 2004 and was on the *Times* paperback best-seller list for thirty-three weeks. Then came "Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon," by Daniel Dennett, a philosopher at Tufts University, who has written popular books on the science of consciousness and on Darwin. Next was "The God Delusion," by Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist and Britain's preëminent science writer. Harris joined battle again last year with "Letter to a Christian Nation," which renewed his attack on Christianity in particular. And now there is "God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything" (Twelve; $24.99), by Christopher Hitchens, which is both the most articulate and the angriest of the lot. Hitchens is a British-born writer who lives in Washington, D.C., and is a columnist for *Vanity Fair* and *Slate*. He thrives at the lectern, where his powers of rhetoric and recall enable him to entertain an audience, go too far, and almost get away with it. These gifts are amply reflected in "God Is Not Great."

Hitchens is nothing if not provocative. Creationists are "yokels," Pascal's theology is "not far short of sordid," the reasoning of the Christian writer C. S. Lewis is "so pathetic as to defy description," Calvin was a "sadist and torturer and killer," Buddhist sayings are "almost too easy to parody," most Eastern spiritual discourse is "not even wrong," Islam is "a rather obvious and ill-arranged set of plagiarisms," Hanukkah is a "vapid and annoying holiday," and the psalmist King David was an "unscrupulous bandit."



In the second century A.D., it was the Christians who were denounced as "atheists."

JONATHAN BOROFSKY, "FOUR GODS" (1994)

It's possible to wonder, indeed, where plain speaking ends and misanthropy begins: Hitchens says that the earth sometimes seems to him to be "a prison colony and lunatic asylum that is employed as a dumping ground by far-off and superior civilizations." He certainly likes to adopt the tone of a bemused Martian envoy hammering out a report for headquarters. (We hear of "a show-biz woman bizarrely known as Madonna.") In a curious rhetorical tic, Hitchens regularly refers to people whom he wishes to ridicule by their zoological class. Thus the followers of Muhammad are "mammals," as is the prophet himself, and so are the seventeenth-century false messiah Sabbatai Zevi and St. Francis of Assisi; Japan's wartime Emperor Hirohito is a "ridiculously overrated mammal," and Kim Il Sung, the father of North Korea's current dictator, is a "ludicrous mammal." Hitchens is trying to say that these people are mere fallible mortals; but his way of saying it makes him come across as rather an odd fish.

He is also a fallible one. After rightly railing against female genital mutilation in Africa, which is an indigenous cultural practice with no very firm ties to any particular religion, Hitchens lunges at male circumcision. He claims that it is a medically dangerous procedure that has made countless lives miserable. This will come as news to the Jewish community, where male circumcision is universal, and where doctors, hypochondria, and overprotective mothers are not exactly unknown. Jews, Muslims, and others among the nearly one-third of the world's male population who have been circumcised may be reassured by the World Health Organization's recent announcement that it recommends male circumcision as a means of preventing the spread of AIDS.

Hitchens is on firmer ground as he traipses around the world on a tour of sectarian conflicts. He recounts how, a week before September 11th, a hypothetical question was put to him by Dennis Prager, an American talk-show host. Hitchens was asked to imagine himself in a foreign city at dusk, with a large group of men coming toward him. Would he feel safer, or less safe, if he were to learn that they were coming from a prayer meeting? With justified relish, the widely travelled Hitchens responds that he has had that experience in Belfast, Beirut, Bombay, Belgrade, Bethlehem, and Baghdad, and that, in each case, the answer would be a resounding "less safe." He relates what he has seen or knows of warring factions of Protestants and Catholics in Ulster; Christians and Muslims in Beirut and in Bethlehem; Hindus and Muslims in Bombay; Roman Catholic Croatians, Orthodox Serbians, and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia; and Shiites, Sunnis, and Christians in Baghdad. In these cases and others, he argues, religion has exacerbated ethnic conflicts. As he puts it, "religion has been an enormous multiplier of tribal suspicion and hatred."

That's more plausible than what Sam Harris has to say on the subject. He maintains that religious belief not only aggravates such conflicts but is "the explicit cause" of them. He believes this even of Northern Ireland, where the Troubles between pro-British Unionists and pro-Irish Republicans began around 1610, when Britain confiscated Irish land and settled English and Scottish planters on it. As far as Harris is concerned, Islam brought down the Twin Towers, thanks in no small part to the incendiary language of the Koran; Middle East politics, history, and economics are irrelevant sideshows. This thesis suffers from a problem of timing: if he is right, why did Al Qaeda not arise, say, three hundred years ago, when the Koran said exactly what it says now?

UNKNOWN AGE

For all the features it hoards and displays
age seems to be without substance at any time

whether morning or evening it is a moment of air
held between the hands like a stunned bird

while I stand remembering light in the trees
of another century on a continent long submerged

with no way of telling whether the leaves at that time
felt memory as they were touching the day

and no knowledge of what happened to the reflections
on the pond's surface that never were seen again

the bird lies still while the light goes on flying

—*W. S. Merwin*

One practical problem for anti-religious writers is the diversity of religious views. However carefully a skeptic frames his attacks, he will be told that what people in fact believe is something different. For example, when Terry Eagleton, a British critic who has been a professor of English at Oxford, lambasted Dawkins's "The God Delusion" in the *London Review of Books*, he wrote that "card-carrying rationalists" like Dawkins "invariably come up with vulgar caricatures of religious faith that would make a first-year theology student wince." That is unfair, because millions of the faithful around the world believe things that would make a first-year theology student wince. A large survey in 2001 found that more than half of American Catholics, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians believed that Jesus sinned—thus rejecting a central dogma of their own churches.

So how is a would-be iconoclast supposed to tell exactly what the faithful believe? Interpreting the nature and prevalence of religious opinions is tricky, particularly if you depend on polls. Respondents can be lacking in seriousness, unsure what they believe, and evasive. Spiritual values and practices are what pollsters call "motherhood" issues: everybody knows that he is supposed to be in favor of them. Thus sociologists estimate that maybe only half of the Americans who say that they regularly attend church actually do so. The World Values Survey Association, an international network of social scientists, conducts research in eighty countries, and not long ago asked a large sample of the earth's population to say which of four alternatives came closest to their own beliefs: a personal God (forty-two per cent chose this), a spirit or life force (thirty-four per cent), neither of these (ten per cent), don't know (fourteen per cent). Depending on what the respondents understood by a "spirit or life force," belief in God may be far less widespread than simple yes/no polls suggest.

In some religious research, it is not necessarily the respondents who are credulous. Harris has made much of a survey that suggests that forty-four per cent of Americans believe that Jesus will return to judge mankind within the next fifty years. But, in 1998, a fifth of non-Christians in America told a poll for *Newsweek* that they, too, expected Jesus to return. What does Harris make of that? Any excuse for a party, perhaps. He also worries about a poll that said that nearly three-quarters of Americans believe in angels—by which, to judge from blogs and online forums on the subject, some of them may have meant streaks of luck, or their own delightful infants.

The Bible is a motherhood issue, too. Harris takes at face value a Gallup poll suggesting that eighty-three per cent of Americans regard it as the Word of God, and he, like Dawkins and Hitchens, uses up plenty of ink establishing the wickedness of many tales in the Old Testament. Critics of the Bible should find consolation in the fact that many people do not have a clue what is in it. Surveys by the Barna Research Group, a Christian organization, have found that most Christians don't know who preached the Sermon on the Mount.

The tangled diversity of faith is, in the event, no obstacle for Hitchens. He knows exactly which varieties of religion need attacking; namely, the whole lot. And if he has left anyone out he would probably like to hear about it so that he can rectify the omission. From the perspective of the new atheists, religion is all one entity; those who would apologize for any of its forms—Harris and Dawkins, in particular, insist on this point—are helping to sustain the whole. But, though the vague belief in a "life force" may be misguided, it's hard to make the case that it's dangerous. And there's a dreamy incoherence in their conviction that moderate forms of religion somehow enable fundamentalist zeal and violence to survive. Are we really going to tame the fervor of an extremist imam's mosque in Waziristan by weakening the plush-toy creed of a nondenominational church in Chappaqua? If there were no religion, it's true, neither house of worship would exist. So perhaps we are just being asked to sway along with John Lennon's "Imagine." ("Imagine there's no countries/It isn't hard to do/Nothing to kill or die for/And no religion too.")

When Hitchens weighs the pros and cons of religion in the recent past, the evidence he provides is sometimes lopsided. He discusses the role of the Dutch Reformed Church in maintaining apartheid in South Africa, but does not mention the role of the Anglican Church in ending it. He attacks some in the Catholic Church, especially Pope Pius XII, for their appeasement of Nazism, but says little about the opposition to Nazism that came from religious communities and institutions. In "Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century," Jonathan Glover, who is the director of the Center of Medical Law and Ethics at Kings College London, documents such opposition, and writes, "It is striking how many protests against and acts of resistance to atrocity have . . . come from principled religious commitment." The loss of such commitment, Glover suggests, should be of concern even to nonbelievers. Still, Hitchens succeeds in compiling a list of evils that the faithful, too, should find sobering. Now that so much charitable work is carried out by secular bodies, religious ones have to work harder to keep the moral high ground. For the Catholic Church in particular—with its opposition to contraception, including the distribution of condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS, and the covering up of child abuse by priests—the ledger is not looking good.

Bertrand Russell, who had a prodigious knowledge of history and a crisp wit, claimed in 1930 that he could think of only two useful contributions that religion had made to civilization. It had helped fix the calendar, and it had made Egyptian priests observe eclipses carefully enough to predict them. He could at least have added Bach's St. Matthew Passion and more than a few paintings; but perhaps the legacy of religion is too large a conundrum to be argued either way. The history of the West has been so closely interwoven with the history of religious institutions and ideas that it is hard to be confident about what life would have been like without them. One of Kingsley Amis's lesser-known novels, "The Alteration," tried to envisage an alternative course for modern history in which the Reformation never happened, science is a dirty word, and in 1976 most of the planet is ruled by a Machiavellian Pope from Yorkshire. In this world, Jean-Paul Sartre is a Jesuit and the central mosaic in Britain's main cathedral is by David Hockney. That piece of fancy is dizzying enough on its own. But imagine attempting such a thought experiment in the contrary fashion, and rolling it back several thousand years to reveal a world with no churches, mosques, or temples. The idea that people would have been nicer to one another if they had never got religion, as Hitchens, Dawkins, and Harris seem to think, is a strange position for an atheist to take. For if man is wicked enough to have invented religion for himself he is surely wicked enough to have found alternative ways of making mischief.

In the early days of the Christian era, nobody was fantasizing about a world with no religion, but there were certainly those who liked to imagine a world with no Christians. The first surviving example of anti-Christian polemic is strikingly similar in tone to that of some of today's militant atheists. In the second century, it was Christians who were called "atheists," because they failed to worship the accepted gods. "On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians" was written in 178 A.D. by Celsus, an eclectic follower of Plato. The Christian deity, Celsus proclaimed, is a contradictory invention. He "keeps his purposes to himself for ages, and watches with indifference as wickedness triumphs over good," and only after a long time decides to intervene and send his son: "Did he not care before?" Moses is said to be "stupid"; his books, and those of the prophets, are "garbage." Christians have "concocted an absolutely offensive doctrine of everlasting punishment." Their injunction to turn the other cheek was put much better by Socrates. And their talk of a Last Judgment is "complete nonsense."

There's not much more where that came from, because within a couple of hundred years Christians became the ones to decide who counted as an atheist and was to be punished accordingly. Pagan anti-Christian writings were destroyed wherever possible. In truth, from the start of the Christian era until the eighteenth century, there were probably very few people in the West who thought that there was no God of any sort. Those thinkers who had serious doubts about the traditional conception of God—of whom there were many in the seventeenth century—substituted another sort of deity, usually a more distant or less personalized one.

Even Voltaire, one of the fiercest critics of superstition, Christianity, and the Church's abuse of power, was a man of deep religious feeling. His God, though, was beyond human understanding and had no concern for man. (Voltaire's satirical tale "Candide," which attacks the idea that all is for the best in a world closely watched over by a benevolent God, was partly inspired by a huge earthquake in Lisbon, which struck while the faithful were at Mass on All Saints' Day in 1755 and killed perhaps thirty thousand people.)

Voltaire, like many others before and after him, was awed by the order and the beauty of the universe, which he thought pointed to a supreme designer, just as a watch points to a watchmaker. In 1779, a year after Voltaire died, that idea was attacked by David Hume, a cheerful Scottish historian and philosopher, whose way of undermining religion was as arresting for its strategy as it was for its detail. Hume couldn't have been more different from today's militant atheists.

In his "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion," which was published posthumously, and reports imaginary discussions among three men, Hume prized apart the supposed analogy between the natural world and a designed artifact. Even if the analogy were apt, he pointed out, the most one could infer from it would be a superior craftsman, not an omnipotent and perfect deity. And, he argued, if it is necessary to ask who made the world it must also be necessary to ask who, or what, made that maker. In other words, God is merely the answer that you get if you do not ask enough questions. From the accounts of his friends, his letters, and some posthumous essays, it is clear that Hume had no trace of religion, did not believe in an afterlife, and was particularly disdainful of Christianity. He had a horror of zealotry. Yet his many writings on religion have a genial and even superficially pious tone. He wanted to convince his religious readers, and recognized that only gentle and reassuring persuasion would work. In a telling passage in the "Dialogues," Hume has one of his characters remark that a person who openly proclaimed atheism, being guilty of "indiscretion and imprudence," would not be very formidable.

Hume sprinkled his gunpowder through the pages of the "Dialogues" and left the book primed so that its arguments would, with luck, ignite in his readers' own minds. And he always offered a way out. In "The Natural History of Religion," he undermined the idea that there are moral reasons to be religious, but made it sound as if it were still all right to believe in proofs of God's existence. In an essay about miracles, he undermined the idea that it is ever rational to accept an apparent revelation from God, but made it sound as if it were still all right to have faith. And in the "Dialogues" he undermined proofs of God's existence, but made it sound as if it were all right to believe on the basis of revelation. As the Cambridge philosopher Edward Craig has put it, Hume never tried to topple all the supporting pillars of religion at once.

In Paris, meanwhile, a number of thinkers began to profess atheism openly. They were the first influential group to do so, and included Denis Diderot, the co-editor of the Enlightenment's great Encyclopédie, and Baron D'Holbach, who hosted a salon of freethinkers. Hume visited them, and made several friends there; they presented him with a large gold medal. But the *philosophes* were too dogmatic for Hume's taste. To Hume's like-minded friend the historian Edward Gibbon, they suffered from "intolerant zeal." Still, they represented a historical vanguard: explicit attacks on religion as a whole poured forth within the next hundred years.

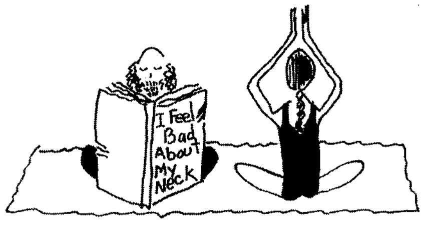
Since all the arguments against belief have been widely publicized for a long time, today's militant atheists must sometimes wonder why religion persists. Hitchens says that it is born of fear and probably ineradicable. Harris holds that there are genuine spiritual experiences; having kicked sand in the faces of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, he dives headlong into the surf of Eastern spirituality, encouraging readers to try Buddhist techniques of meditation instead of dangerous creeds. Dawkins devotes a chapter, and Dennett most of his book, to evolutionary accounts of how religion may have arisen and how its ideas spread. It's thin stuff, and Dennett stresses that these are early days for a biological account of religion. It may, however, be too late for one. If a propensity toward religious belief is "hard-wired" in the brain, as it is sometimes said to be, the wiring has evidently become frayed. This is especially true in rich countries, nearly all of which—Ireland and America are exceptions—have relatively high rates of unbelief.

After making allowances for countries that have, or recently have had, an officially imposed atheist ideology, in which there might be some social pressure to deny belief in God, one can venture conservative estimates of the number of unbelievers in the world today. Reviewing a large number of studies among some fifty countries, Phil Zuckerman, a sociologist at Pitzer College, in Claremont, California, puts the figure at between five hundred million and seven hundred and fifty million. This excludes such highly populated places as Brazil, Iran, Indonesia, and Nigeria, for which information is lacking or patchy. Even the low estimate of five hundred million would make unbelief the fourth-largest persuasion in the world, after Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. It is also by far the youngest, with no significant presence in the West before the eighteenth century. Who can say what the landscape will look like once unbelief has enjoyed a past as long as Islam's—let alone as long as Christianity's? God is assuredly not on the side of the unbelievers, but history may yet be. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Angelica, *by Arthur Phillips (Random House; $25.95).* Phillips's third novel, set in Victorian London, starts as a ghost story. When Joseph instructs his wife, Constance, to have their four-year-old daughter, Angelica, moved from their bedroom into a room of her own, Constance becomes convinced that a seductive spectral force is preying on the child. The catastrophe that follows is relayed from the perspectives of Constance; of her supposed redeemer, an actress turned exorcist; and of Joseph—each view ultimately being rendered by the adult Angelica. What at first appears a rather glib ghost story predicated on Victorian clichés of sexual repression and patriarchal tyranny turns into a spectacular, ever-proliferating tale of mingled motives, psychological menace, and delicately told crises of appetite and loneliness. Phillips sustains a pastiche of Victorian writing and ideas with enticing playfulness, and without making his characters or their complex fears and desires laughable.

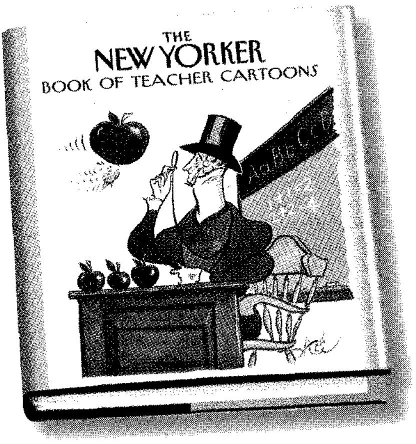
The Welsh Girl, *by Peter Ho Davies (Houghton Mifflin; $24).* In rural Wales in 1944, the bright, restless daughter of a sheep farmer finds herself pregnant after a violent sexual encounter with an English soldier. Her sense of entrapment draws her in mute sympathy to the newly built internment camp in the valley, where an angst-ridden German P.O.W., struggling with the dishonor of having surrendered to the enemy, realizes that he has lost faith in the Nazi cause. Davies's début novel frames the plight of these characters with the separate story of a half-Jewish German immigrant, now a British Army intelligence officer, who resents his Jewish ancestry. His mission is to debunk the amnesia claims of Rudolf Hess, the former Deputy Führer, and their scenes together are a tour de force, as the imperturbable Nazi quietly lays bare his interrogator's own denials and evasions.


I Feel Bad About My Neck

Inventing Human Rights, *by Lynn Hunt (Norton; $25.95).* In 1748, Montesquieu, in an attack on the then common use of torture, wrote, "I was going to say that it might be suitable for despotic government . . . but I hear the voice of nature crying out against me." His wavering, Hunt writes, illustrates the revolutionary quality of the years leading to the Declarations of Independence and of the Rights of Man, when something inconceivable—an innate set of social and political rights—suddenly became "self-evident." Such claims, once made, had a "tendency to cascade," encompassing more and more groups, even as they engendered what she calls "evil twins": ideologies that dehumanized those they disenfranchised. Hunt's survey is fast-paced, provocative, and ultimately optimistic. Declarations, she writes, are not empty words but transformative; they make us want to become the people they claim we are.

The Grand Surprise: The Journals of Leo Lerman, *edited by Stephen Pascal (Knopf; $37.50).* Lerman, who died in 1994, was at the center of fashionable New York society for almost fifty years, thanks to his work at such magazines as *Vogue* and *Mademoiselle.* The son of a housepainter in East Harlem, Lerman was drawn to "the surface glitter" of the élite, and he helped launch the careers of countless singers, writers, actresses, and artists. He was known for frugal but grand soirées—Marlene Dietrich emptied the ashtrays at one; William Faulkner stood in line with Maria Callas for Chinese food at another—but he never entirely lost his sense of being an outsider, or his feeling that magazine work was a distraction from "a life of letters." Lerman's diaries, interspersed with his correspondence and an unfinished memoir, form a rich, occasionally rueful mosaic of a man who collected friendships the way those around him collected wealth or accolades, and who, most of the time, seemed to find his life the better for it.

Straight-A Humor



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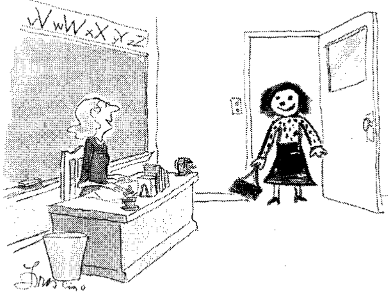

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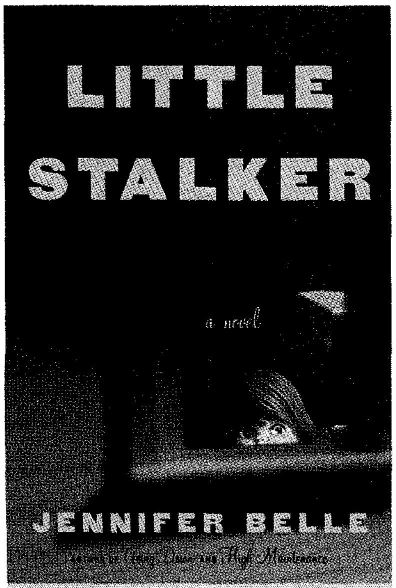

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DISAPPEARANCES

Nathan Englander's novel of political terror.

BY WYATT MASON

Early in Nathan Englander's first novel, "The Ministry of Special Cases" (Knopf; $25), Kaddish Poznan returns home late one night to find an unsettling welcome at his apartment door: "He reached for the keyhole and—accompanied by the sound of metal against metal—discovered that there was no hole to be found." Not on the wrong floor, not at the wrong door, neither drunk nor delusional, Kaddish sees that the keyhole, to which he has reliably found his way for twenty years, has, in his absence, disappeared.

Set in Buenos Aires in 1976, in the months after the coup that drove the Peronists from power, the novel contains many such disturbing erasures. Englander tells the story of a family's losses during Argentina's "dirty war," when thousands of people were kidnapped and killed by the military government, becoming known as "the disappeared." This morally fraught subject recalls Englander's first book, the story collection "For the Relief of Unbearable Urges," which revolved around the persecution of Jews through history and the problems of Jewish identity in the face of such a history. As in the stories, Englander's approach to his dependably tragic subject remains dedicatedly ironic.

At the center of the novel's carefully staged ironies is Kaddish himself: an Argentine Jew, a prostitute's son, and a man who "takes money to desecrate the dead." His name conjures the Jewish prayer of sanctification that is also a prayer of mourning, but his actions are the opposite of pious. Late at night, hammer and chisel in hand, he steals into the Jewish cemetery "established by the pimps and whores of Buenos Aires." For descendants of those buried there who wish to avoid embarrassment, or reprisal from the capricious military junta, Kaddish offers "a face-lift for the family name": he makes the names of disreputable forebears vanish.

The work earns Kaddish an inconsistent living and the scorn of his son, Pato. Nineteen, a college student and a pot smoker, an idealist but no revolutionary, Pato decries his father's way of life and resents being brought along to assist in the nighttime defacements. Kaddish's long-suffering wife, Lillian, meanwhile, still loves him, although her opinion of him has shifted: "She had married him and his thick neck for the strength they promised, for exactly the things he hadn't delivered." And where Kaddish facilitates erasure—at one point, Pato loses a fingertip to his father's errant chisel—Lillian has become a broker against it: she sells insurance to people growing rapidly aware of all that could be taken from them, collecting "premiums against their worst fears."

Nathan Englander

RICCARDO VECCHIO

In the novel's first third—against a background of tanks and soldiers occupying the city's streets, bodies being tossed from apartment windows, and men Pato's age being discovered with their throats cut—Englander shows a family bracing against the inevitable. "You cannot ever let your guard down in Buenos Aires," Lillian thinks. "It's like standing in the ocean and facing the beach. It's up to you to know what's behind you. Always there's another wave coming." Although Englander draws Buenos Aires quite sketchily—he depends more on a generic idea of the city—his evocation of the tensions the Poznans live under has nuance and power. In one scene, the family manages to clear a military checkpoint despite Pato's having forgotten his identity papers. Afterward, Pato, humiliated to the point of tears, berates his father:

> Kaddish told the boy to stop. He yelled at him to stop. Pato continued long enough for Kaddish to give up his yelling and go silent, and then—Lillian tried to deny it—Kaddish drove on, weeping even more loudly and woundedly than Pato had. Kaddish cried and drove and wiped his eyes on a sleeve. Lillian understood that it had gone too far and decided to bring it to a halt.
>
> She was really about to when Kaddish pulled the handbrake, stopping their lane completely, and, engine running, got out. "Too much," he said, through tears. He then wove on foot across that wide and beautiful avenue he'd been admiring. He maneuvered the lanes, slapping at the hoods of cars, directing himself out.

The understatement of the prose is well tuned to the presentation of strong emotion, and Englander provides a persuasive sense of the combustible mixture of external, political tensions and internal, domestic ones. The emotions of the family are Englander's chief concern here, and Kaddish, the character with the clever name, becomes a man for whom we feel a full measure of pity.

As the novel unfolds, however, Englander seems unwilling to trust this deepening of Kaddish's character, or even, perhaps, to trust his own development as a writer. He consistently undercuts seriousness with shtick, even as he raises the emotional stakes of the story. Soon, Pato becomes one of the disappeared, and the novel follows Kaddish and Lillian's attempts to find their son and to endure his absence. Many scenes, told from the distinct points of view of the two parents, offer tender insights into their suffering, their desperation, their growing alienation from each other. And yet, as if in apology for such gravity, Englander devises a facile comic line that runs parallel to his tragic one, undermining the emotions that he has taken such care—and shown such talent—in cultivating.

Shortly before their son vanishes, for instance, Kaddish and Lillian—both of whom have enormous noses—get nose jobs. Readers of Englander's stories, whose characters worry about hairy upper lips and unbeautiful Orthodox wigs, might see this rhinoplastic turn as a comic expression of ambivalence toward a fundamental feature of Jewish identity, but the caprice seems tonally irreconcilable with the events of the book. After Pato disappears, Lillian, overcome with grief and tears, finds that she has damaged her nose by blowing it too much; it has "broken free" from her face. Kaddish goes back to the doctor responsible in search of a remedy. The doctor asks what happened:

> "Did she walk into a wall? Frisbees—ever since the Frisbee made its way south, they break many a nose."
>
> "Crying actually. She was upset and crying and it fell."
>
> "It collapsed on its own?"
>
> "Came loose, more. She feels—we feel—it should be under warranty."
>
> "Crying is regular nose usage by any standard. I wish you'd clarified right off."
>
> "You'll make it right. She wants her old nose back."
>
> "That's impossible."
>
> "You work miracles. Work another."
>
> "I don't even know what I'd use to reconstruct it. We'd have to fashion it from a rib. Maybe we can pull her femur if she doesn't mind walking with a cane."
>
> "Not funny, Doctor."

But of course it is funny. The question is whether it should be. "The most absurd things happen in life," Nikolai Gogol wrote in "The Nose," his own story about nasal wanderings. If Dostoyevsky reputedly said, "We have all come out of Gogol's Overcoat," a host of comic writers as diverse as Kafka, Grass, Heller, Vonnegut, Rushdie, and Foer might claim to have come out of Gogol's Nose. Englander's use of absurdist humor in the face of political terror clearly places him in this tradition, one that runs in tandem with a tradition in Jewish humor of mixing misery and laughter. Yet his imagination seems more vivid and resourceful when taking emotional situations head on, and his strategy of offsetting pathos with bathos seems willed; the nose joke comes off as more Catskills than Gogol. As the novel progresses, and Kaddish draws closer to being an embodiment of the prayer that his name suggests, Englander's ironic sideshow risks the erasure of something far harder to achieve, and far sadder to see disappear. ♦

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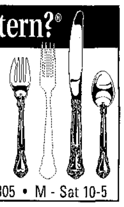


IN FASHION

CUT LOOSE

Paul Poiret's revolution.

BY JUDITH THURMAN

Two years ago, at an auction in Paris that set new records for couture, the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum acquired twenty-six ensembles by Paul Poiret that his granddaughter had put up for sale. They had belonged to the couturier's wife and muse, Denise, and hadn't been seen in public since she wore them at the turn of the twentieth century. Even though the couple divorced, with bitterness on both sides, in 1928, Mme. Poiret reverently preserved her legacy, and kept a diary of the occasions—a ball, a fête, a première—for which each garment was created. Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton, the curators of the institute, were stunned, Bolton told me, "by the revelation of Poiret's modernism." As Janet Flanner wrote in these pages eighty years ago, Poiret was one of those "pirates" who "steal ideas from the future and force them on their own generation." There hadn't been a Poiret retrospective in America since 1976, and the Costume Institute almost immediately began planning one.

"Poiret: King of Fashion" occupies a special exhibitions gallery on the main floor of the Met. In addition to most of the new acquisitions, there are twenty-two Poirets from the archives or on loan; a display of accessories, decorative objects, and graphic art; and flacons of his perfumes. (He was the first couturier to brand himself by building an empire that purveyed, in addition to scents, home furnishings, "genuine reproductions" for the mass market, and a life style.) Jean-Hugues de Chatillon, a scenographer for the Paris opera and ballet, has designed an installation of lush, hand-painted backdrops that, like a whiff of opium, evoke the fantasy life of the Belle Époque. Projected digital animations illustrate the ingenious construction of a brown silk-velvet opera coat from 1919 and a pink satin evening gown from 1923. The beauty of the show is of a piece with its contents. It invites you to discover what Poiret's contemporaries saw in him—and what they couldn't yet see.

Poiret was a rarity among couturiers: a native Parisian. He was born in 1879, the son of a draper whose family lived above the shop. His parents sent him to an élite lycée, where he felt out of place, until that feeling—a mixture of shame, yearning, and defiance—mobilized his ambition. In part to deflate his pretensions, his father apprenticed him to an umbrella-maker. But Poiret stole time to dress a wooden mannequin that his sisters gave him, using scraps of parasol silk, and to make fashion sketches. Their originality recommended him to the courtly designer Jacques Doucet, who became his idol and mentor, giving him the opportunity to dress Réjane and Sarah Bernhardt, onstage and off. Among his costumes for Bernhardt were the breeches that she wore, at fifty-six, to play Napoleon's adolescent son in Rostand's "L'Aiglon"—her most famous trouser role. But she got Poiret fired when, within earshot, he made some sarcastic remarks about the production.

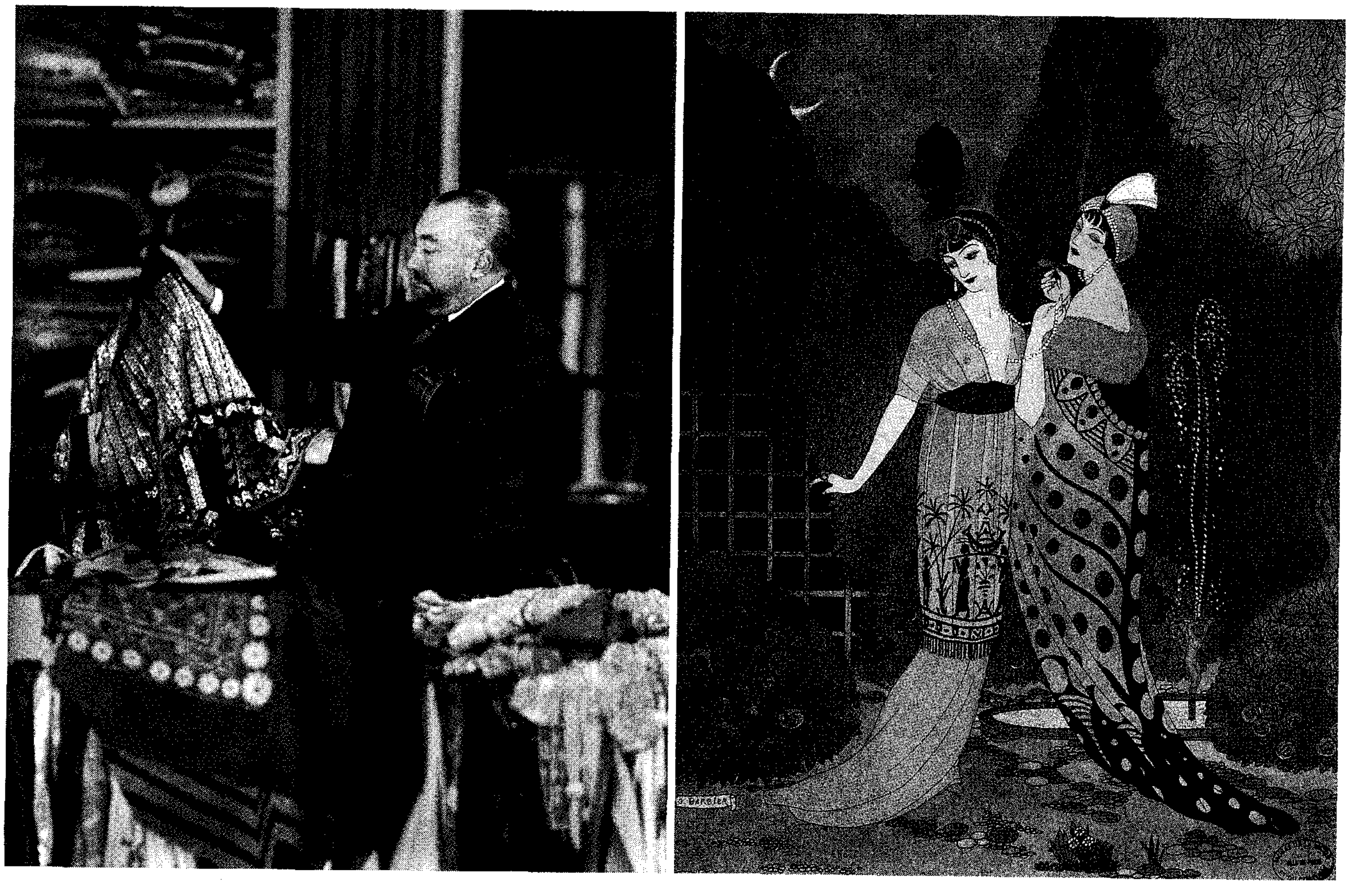
In 1900, Poiret served ten months in the Army, then was hired by the Worth brothers to design casual daywear—"fried potatoes," as opposed to the "truffles" of their court gowns. But a marvellous kimono cloak, his earliest masterpiece (a later version is in the show), horrified an elderly Russian princess, who declared it a monstrosity. Jean Worth himself objected, perhaps jealously, to what he called Poiret's "dishrags," including a novel dress that fell vertically in a cascade of pleats, prefiguring the flowing neoclassic columns that would make him famous. According to Palmer White, Poiret's biographer, he "was tired of antagonism and wanted to strike out on his own." His mother lent him some money and, in 1903, he opened a modest establishment on the Rue Auber, behind the Opéra. With some prodding from Doucet, Réjane paid him a visit. She ordered a suit of marine-blue serge edged in bright red that, White reports, "she wore everywhere, and to greatest effect when, with regard to her divorce, she held Press conferences to express her strongly feminist views."

Poiret was the apostle of comfort and simplicity who invented the sheath and the sack dress (both usually ascribed to Balenciaga, who streamlined them in the nineteen-fifties). He proposed the first couture trousers—a pantaloon gown or suit for day and a lamé dhoti worn under a lampshade tunic for evening. Most notably, he abolished the corset, inviting women to brave the streets, and sometimes the hostile mobs that attacked them with hisses or even blows, in the silhouette of a new century. The audacity of the clothes, which were more suggestive of an attitude—an uncorseted mind—than an erogenous zone, and the youthful charisma of their creator (he was not yet thirty) attracted such rebels as Isadora Duncan, Peggy Guggenheim, and Nancy Cunard. Their meeker sisters in Europe and America were emboldened by example.

Yet Poiret also perpetrated the hobble skirt, which makes him a problematic candidate for a feminist Wall of the Righteous. (There are no hobble skirts at the Met.) "I freed the bust," he liked to boast, "but I shackled the legs." And, like so many of his contemporaries, he was enthralled with the barbaric splendor and the hyper-refinement of an imaginary Orient. He styled his own persona after that of a sultan from "The Thousand and One Nights," the theme of a bacchanal ("The Thousand and Second Night") that, in 1911, the Poirets threw in the garden of their eighteenth-century mansion, on the Right Bank. Three hundred guests consumed nine hundred litres of champagne, while parrots and monkeys screeched in the shrubbery, and semi-nude black houris and jinns circulated with platters of exotic delicacies. Scheherazade's tales had recently been translated into French by the Arabist Joseph-Charles Mardrus (whose bride, the bohemian writer Lucie Delarue, wore a cycling outfit to their wedding that may have inspired Poiret's harem pants), and she was, in many respects, his paradoxical ideal woman: the slave girl as free spirit.

ROGER-VIOLLET/IMAGE WORKS: LEFT, LIPNITZKI; RIGHT, GEORGES BARBIER, "CHEZ POIRET"/MUSÉE GALLIERA

Poiret was a master of synthesis and invention, but, like most autodidacts, he was also a sponge who soaked up inspiration and was loath to acknowledge it. It isn't a coincidence that the earliest Poiret in the show is dated 1905—the year he married Denise. The purity and assurance that radiate from her photographs, even in the most outré setting or creation, were always his best advertisement. The Fauves suggested Poiret's palette, and the Ballets Russes his gestalt. He commissioned Raoul Dufy to design his exuberant textiles and wallpapers, and hired the unknown Man Ray and the young Edward Steichen to take his fashion photographs. The artist Paul Iribe (a lover of Coco Chanel) sketched Poiret's trademark, a rose, and worked with Georges Lepape on the stylized, deliciously colored stencils that illustrated his collections. Earlier revolts informed Poiret's iconoclasm. His shift was modelled on the Empire chemise—an homage to the republican fashions of Greece and Rome that came into vogue with the French Revolution, and reappeared as a challenge to Victorian conformity in the Artistic Dress of the pre-Raphaelites. Indian, Japanese, and Islamic robes taught him to construct a garment of rectangular panels, without a pattern. His virtuosity as a draper was unrivalled except, perhaps, by Madeleine Vionnet, and, more than fifty years before Issey Miyake, Poiret, who couldn't sew, created minimalist coats and dresses by twisting one continuous length of fabric into a three-dimensional volume.



Poiret, one of the boldest innovators and self-promoters in fashion history, and two of his gowns, from 1912.

If Poiret was one of the boldest innovators and self-promoters in fashion history, he was also one of its most spectacular casualties. There was no hyperbole to the epithet bestowed upon him by the American press—"the King of Fashion"—which Poiret repaid, on his return from a tour of the United States, with a pontifical tirade on the pathetic sameness and puritanism of American women. But the revolution that Poiret had set in motion caught up with him in the twenties, in the form of his nemesis, Chanel, and what he contemptuously called her "*misère de luxe.*" He dissipated his creative forces striving for novelty, and refused to understand that the women of a fast new generation weren't nostalgic for harem life, and didn't have the patience to reinvent themselves every time they got dressed—they wanted a uniform. Even before Denise left him, his profligacy had plunged him into debt, then into ruin. He lost his collection of modern paintings; the mansion and a villa in Saint-Tropez; several opportunities for a comeback; and, as the years passed, sixty pounds of his lordly heft to disease and poverty. Evicted from a series of ever humbler lodgings, Poiret died in 1944, in occupied Paris, nearly destitute. Chanel was living at the Ritz.

There will always be a market for little black dresses, but in recent seasons Milan and Paris have rediscovered the charm of a turban, feathers, a kimono sleeve, graphic filigree, tiered Empire sheaths, harem pants, scarf dresses slipping from a shoulder, and fur-trimmed cocoon opera coats. They speak to a free spirit with the means and the leisure to reinvent herself. "For whom, Madame, do you mourn?" Poiret is said to have asked Chanel, alluding to her favorite color. "For you, Monsieur," she replied. The ghost is risen. ♦

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Images from the Poiret show.

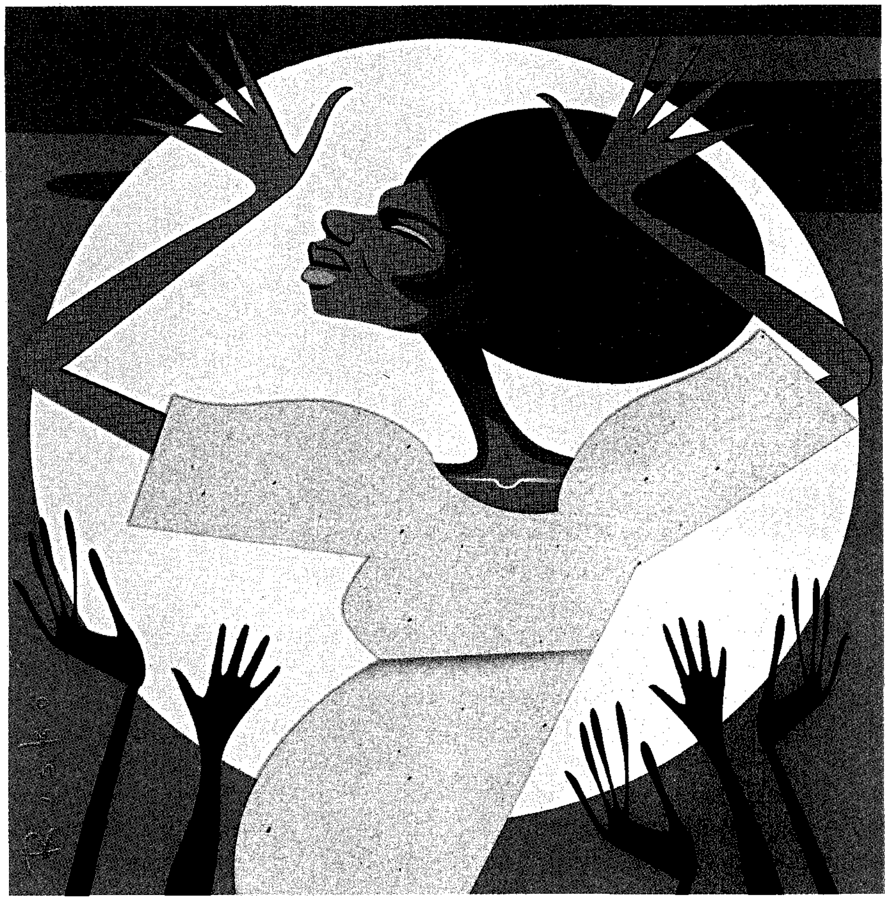
THE THEATRE

HEAT WAVE

"110 in the Shade" returns to Broadway.

BY HILTON ALS

The thirty-six-year-old Audra McDonald is a kind of musical Diana Sands, the revolutionary black actress of the fifties and sixties who broke through New York theatre's racial barriers: a performer so freakishly gifted that you wonder how she does it. Blessed with a beauty and an intelligence that feel entirely accessible—she's the girl next door, without a trace of snootiness—McDonald sings and acts for our delectation because she has talent to spare. Why not share it? It's hard to keep up with McDonald. She has barely finished one number in Lonny Price's splendid revival of the 1963 musical "110 in the Shade" (a Roundabout Theatre production at Studio 54) before she's on to the next series of glittering moments that make her Lizzie Curry such a full-blooded creature.



Audra McDonald in N. Richard Nash's adaptation of "The Rainmaker."

ROBERT RISKO

Lizzie is a spinster. She lives in a small house in the Depression-era Texas Panhandle with her father and her two brothers (Chris Butler and Bobby Steggert, who, as the younger of the two, is an especially winning combination of goofiness and matinée-idol cuteness). Her father, H.C. (John Cullum), is not so much a paternal figure as a supportive observer. His daughter cooks and cleans with a fussy cheerfulness and determination that fail to disguise her loneliness—you can see her struggling not to frown as her brothers question her about this or that possible suitor. The only woman in her world, Lizzie is the source of the family's emotional well-being. She doesn't want to let them down, not even for a minute.

When Lizzie's father and brothers try to help her out by arranging a date with the local sheriff, File (Christopher Innvar), she puts on a white cotton dress and bakes a lemon pie. The prospect of finally finding a lover moves her to act, not to dream. When File doesn't show up, however, Lizzie doesn't know what to do with the pie or with herself in that impractical dress: she treats them both as props in a wedding that she will never have. Soon she does begin to dream, and those dreams are made manifest by Starbuck (the lovely Steve Kazee), a strong dark-haired charlatan who promises to bring a little precipitation to the arid atmosphere—the area is in the grip of a terrible drought. ("110 in the Shade" was written by N. Richard Nash as an adaptation of his 1954 play, "The Rainmaker"; the music is by Harvey Schmidt, the lyrics by Tom Jones.) Starbuck also helps Lizzie to blossom. In his presence, she becomes the woman that her responsibilities have kept her from being: a sexual one. (You get the sense that Lizzie has held herself back from love because she feels married to her family.)

As Lizzie moves away from the despair of File's rejection and into, then out of, Starbuck's arms, McDonald carries us through a range of emotions that are both subtle and comedically satisfying. While Jones's lyrics are adequate, they would be nothing without McDonald's ability to mine them for meaning. She treats them as an essential part of the show's text: little poems that it is her job to parse. (As McDonald has shown, for example, with her rendition—on her latest CD—of Elvis Costello's song "God Give Me Strength," which wrecks the heart, when she is given the right lyrics the marriage between voice and intention is flawless.)

For those audience members who have seen McDonald only in her sporadic television appearances—on "The Bedford Diaries" or "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit"—her Lizzie is a revelation. In Mike Nichols's 2001 TV-movie version of Margaret Edson's play "Wit," McDonald struck me as a serviceable actress, but not a standout. Watching her in this production of "110 in the Shade," which beautifully ignores race and casts black and white performers alike in key roles (File and Starbuck are both played by white actors), I felt a certain melancholy. I was reminded of how underused—or poorly used—actresses like McDonald continue to be onscreen, where they would reach larger audiences. If movies were as color-blind as they should be, McDonald, with her incredible skill, soul, and purpose, could easily become her generation's Meryl Streep.

It's O.K. if you don't like August Wilson's work. Perfectly all right. Nor should you feel that because you're not black or weren't born in Pennsylvania—African-American life in Pittsburgh being the two-time Pulitzer Prize winner's dominant dramaturgical motif—you don't have the tools to understand his plays. It's possible that Wilson's canonization as America's premier black playwright (which began even before he died, in 2005, at age sixty) also frightens you a bit; criticizing him just now might make you feel like Don Imus. Forget all that. Take off those political-correctness-tinted glasses. Go to the Cort Theatre and judge the latest Wilson production, "Radio Golf," for yourself. Directed by Kenny Leon and starring Tonya Pinkins, who played the world-weary title character in Tony Kushner's lovely 2003 musical, "Caroline, or Change," "Radio Golf" is a formulaic work that illustrates why Wilson was not, in the end, a great artist: his approach to examining the lives of black Americans was traditional, often cliché-ridden, and comfortably middlebrow.

Set in Pittsburgh's Hill District in 1997, the play, which was written in 2005 and was the final installment of Wilson's ten-play cycle on black-American life in the twentieth century, revolves around an old canard: two upwardly mobile black entrepreneurs, Harmond Wilks (Harry Lennix) and Roosevelt Hicks (James A. Williams), are gunning to flatten an area of the district to make room for a high-rise filled with chain stores like Starbucks and Barnes & Noble—and to win a little political clout for themselves in the process. (Wilks is hoping to become Pittsburgh's first black mayor.) In order to succeed, of course, the businessmen will have to trash the lives and memories of the neighborhood's colorful habitués. Barely thirty minutes into the action, we're already on familiar ground: it's Arthur Miller's "All My Sons" meets Lifetime TV. Which is where Pinkins comes in. Her character, Mame Wilks, Harmond's profit-hungry wife, knows that if Harmond can get that high-rise built they'll be on easy street; one senses that she will love Harmond quite a bit more if and when he becomes the success that she needs him to be. To keep her on his side, Harmond must reject the past and lick the money-grubbing armpit of the future.

Wilson is the worst kind of moralist. He uses black people—which is to say, "real" or poor black people—as the barometer by which all others must be judged; anyone who doesn't fit the bill is just plain evil. (As one character tells Roosevelt, "You a Negro. . . . I'm a nigger. Negroes are the worst thing in God's creation. Niggers got style. Negroes got blindeyetis. . . . A Negro don't know he's a Negro. He thinks he's a white man. It's Negroes like you who hold us back.") This essentially Puritan strain in Wilson's thinking makes his characters reductive, simple silhouettes projected onto an even simpler backdrop. Near the end of the play, we discover that Harmond is related to one of the very people he wants to displace. (To highlight the symbolic nature of this coincidence, Leon has cast a light-skinned actor as Harmond, and the dark-skinned Anthony Chisholm as his truth-telling bum of a relative.) For Wilson, all blacks are brothers, whether clad in rags or Armani suits. But life doesn't work this way—at least no lives spent under the yoke of this country's astonishing and still prevalent racism. In the nineteen-sixties, academic philosophers and sociologists alike tried to address "the Negro problem"—the economic and racial disadvantages inherent in black life. Wilson came of age in that era, and was clearly influenced by the sanctimonious air of their reasoning. With his own lyrical-sounding agitprop, he, unfortunately, adopted the belief structure of the "concerned" oppressor, while claiming to speak for the oppressed. ♦

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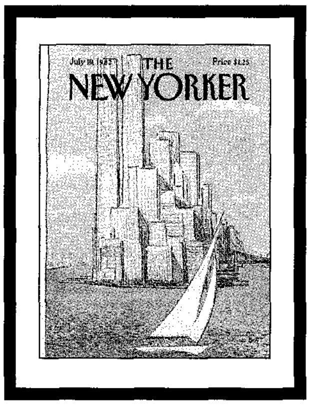

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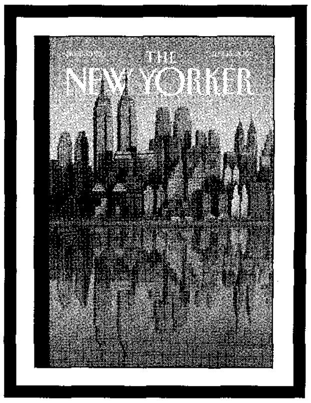

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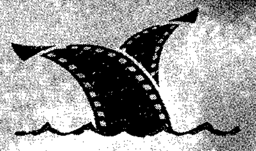

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THE ART WORLD

ORDINARY PEOPLE

An Edward Hopper retrospective.

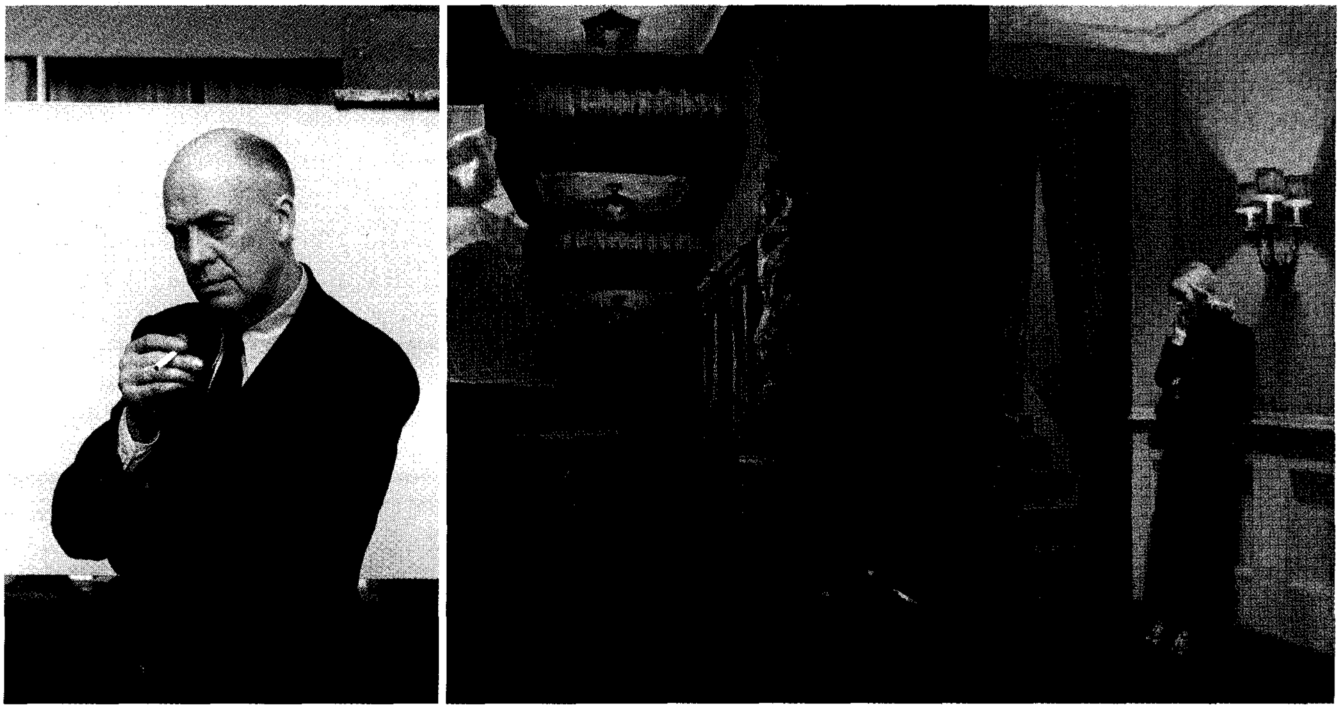
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Why buck crowds to attend the big Edward Hopper retrospective at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston? Don't we know this artist well enough by now? When I want to commune with "Nighthawks" (1942) again, I can do so quite satisfactorily at my dentist's office, where, from a framed poster, the beaky dude and the bony dame at the wee-hours diner convey that root-canal surgery may not rate all that high on the scale of human tribulations. In fact, Hoppers in the flesh add remarkably small increments of pleasure and meaning to Hoppers in reproduction. The scale of the paintings is indifferent, in the way of graphic art. Their drawing is graceless, their colors acrid, and their brushstrokes numb. Anti-Baroque, they are the same thing when looked at up close and when seen from afar. I believe that Hopper painted with reproducibility on his mind, as a new function and fate of images in his time. This is part of what makes him modern—and persistently misunderstood, by detractors, as merely an illustrator. If "Nighthawks" is an illustration, a kick in the head is a lullaby.

A visual bard of ordinary life, Hopper imposed a thudding ordinariness on painting. The strangeness of this quality must be contemplated directly, and in quantity, for its radical character to register at full force. It is the basis of his universal accessibility. Laying the cards of his intention face up, it inspires rare trust, which steadies our minds to receive the living truths that the pictures tell. Hopper stands with two other American artists, Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol, whose likewise monumental styles also trashed prevailing conventions of good painting and have proved to be deathless.

The Boston show is so comprehensive a gathering of Hopper's greatest hits—each a world, created ex nihilo—that it may best be described by what little it lacks, in that regard. I miss about a half-dozen favorites, including "Pennsylvania Coal Town" (1947)—a geeky-looking guy with a rake in late-afternoon sunlight between two old town houses, seemingly glimpsed from a passing car—and "Office in a Small City" (1953): a young man at a desk in a large-windowed corner office like an abstracted control tower, seen from an impossible point of view in the air outside. Both characters appear to daydream, absenting themselves from themselves, as people by Hopper do. Those are relatively late works, from the twenty-some ever less prolific and consistent (but underrated) years before the artist's death, at the age of eighty-four, in 1967. One of the show's curators, Carol Troyen, has deëmphasized that period as well as the busy phases, before the early nineteen-twenties, of Hopper's long maturation, during which he practiced variants of Impressionism and, to support himself, worked unhappily as an illustrator. While including a great many of the watercolors, of New England places, at which he excelled—with light-struck, massy, hardly watery effects, even when they depict water—Troyen scants the revealing drawings with which he painstakingly evolved his painted compositions. This is an occasion for exploring not what Hopper was for himself but what he is for us.

There isn't a lot to know about him, anyhow. Born in Nyack, New York, the son of a drygoods merchant, Hopper studied with Robert Henri and made three sojourns to Europe. He was almost six feet five, and taciturn. In 1924, when a show of watercolors brought him his first success, he married Josephine Verstille Nivison, a disappointed painter and his lively, obstreperous partner for life. She both resented and defended him. She insisted on being the model for nearly all his paintings of women. Childless, they lived on the top floor of a town house on Washington Square and, starting in 1934, spent nearly half their time in a starkly isolated house on Cape Cod. (Hopper seems to have liked places possessed of what might be termed negative feng-shui.) The couple read voraciously, often in French, and were compulsive moviegoers. Hopper portrayed himself and Jo in "Two Comedians" (1965-66), a late painting which is not in the show, as commedia-dell'arte clowns taking a farewell bow.



Hopper in 1941, and his "New York Movie" (1939). The artist bets everything on composition.

ARNOLD NEWMAN/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

A good way to grasp Hopper paintings is to sketch them—never mind if, like me, you can't draw. Just get the main shapes, including those of empty space, and how they nest together in the pictorial rectangle. Hopper bets everything on composition, which, in his work, is almost as tautly considered as in a Mondrian. (He didn't so much hold back from modernism, from which he took what he needed, as see beyond it. He objected to abstraction only as Picasso did, for its limits on emotional engagement.) Hopper's means are light and shadow, which establish the masses and the relative locations of forms. Raking light is the active element in static situations, as a stand-in for the artist, who inhabits his works everywhere and nowhere, like God. The light's authority overrules worries about clotted textures and gawky contours. A wall or an arm is exactly as it is because the light, hitting it, says so.

Hopper's is an art of illuminated outsides that bespeak important insides. He vivifies impenetrable privacies. Notice how seldom he gives houses visible or, if visible, usable-looking doors; but the windows are alive. His preoccupied people will neither confirm nor deny any fantasy they stir; their intensity of being defeats conjecture. Imputations, to them, of "loneliness" are sentimental projections by viewers who ought to look harder. They may not have lives you envy, but they live them without complaint. Another mistake that some observers make is to quibble with Hopper's crudeness, notably in his renderings of flesh and foliage. His insults to taste are even instrumental to his art, focussing attention on what matters, which is drama. Clement Greenberg got it right when he remarked that if Hopper "were a better painter, he would, most likely, not be so superior an artist."

There are Hoppers that don't work, while others, in instructive ways, work somewhat too well. I have in mind "Office at Night" (1940), in which a preposterously voluptuous secretary at a filing cabinet eyes a piece of paper on the floor as her handsome boss reads a document at his desk. The light denotes sunset. A summer wind disturbs the shade at an open window. For me, the dancing pull cord of the shade is one of the choicest details in art history, as an objective correlative, in T. S. Eliot's sense, of "memory and desire." Seen from an elevated point of view, the wonderfully articulated lines and contents of the space cant toward the window. I just wish the office were empty. What will happen between the characters touched by the melancholy and erotic breeze? I don't care. They are types from central casting in an overly explicit cinematic narrative, such as Hopper commonly subsumed to his vision.

Consider his second-most-powerful image, after "Nighthawks": "New York Movie" (1939). In a corner of an ornate theatre, a pretty usherette leans back against a wall out of sight of a screen that displays an illegible fragment of black-and-white movie, watched by two solitary people. Dimmed, reddish lights oppose a russet cast to inky shadows. Parted red curtains frame a stairway to the balcony. The usherette's reverie, if any (she may be dozing), centers our involvement. She has seen the film. Wanting to be elsewhere, she is elsewhere. Where are we? I think we are in Plato's Cave, perceiving layered dispositions of reality—those of the movie, the audience, the usherette, the theatre, and the civilization that must have theatres. I comprehend the picture's economy when I imagine something that is necessarily absent from it: noise, the clamor of a soundtrack that fills the space and assaults the usherette's unwilling ears. Life goes on? No, it roars on, indifferent to all who have temporary shares in it. We exist in the middle of a rush so constant that it resembles stillness. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

DRIFTERS

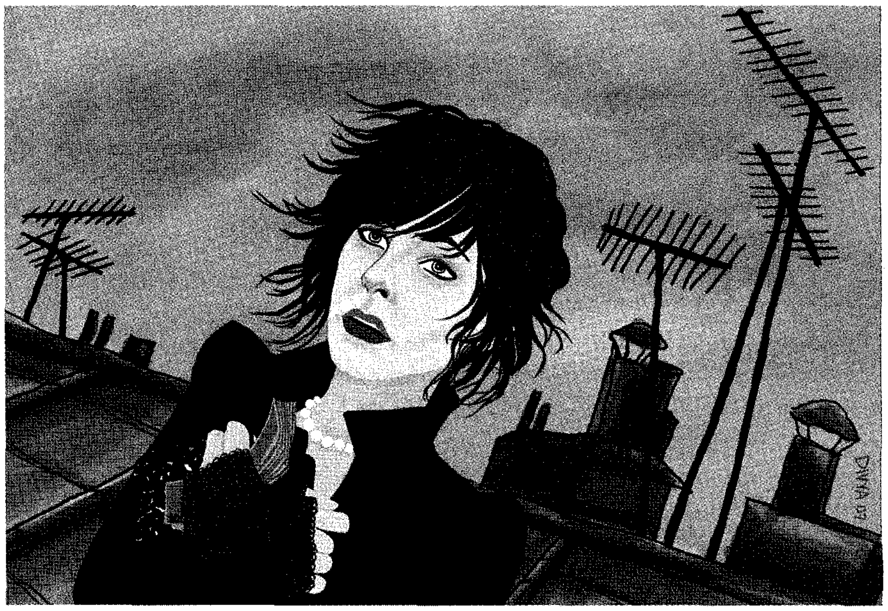
"Fay Grim" and "The Wendell Baker Story."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Near the start of "Fay Grim," the heroine of the title (Parker Posey) is asked out to dinner by Angus (Chuck Montgomery), a publisher with a grave manner and a Biblical beard. Fay is taken aback. "You mean, like a date?" she asks. "I'm afraid so," Angus replies. He sounds like a man reporting a death. If you missed the opening credits, and thus the name of the director, this single exchange would put you right: here is a film by Hal Hartley. For moviegoers in the early nineteen-nineties, especially those enthused by the rise of independent cinema, Hartley was the man to watch. This was due in part to the oblique angle—skewed, amused, and none too impressed—at which he gazed upon the world, and which seemed to rebuke the bluster of the big studio releases. The slightness of works such as "The Unbelievable Truth," "Trust," and "Simple Men" was less a style choice than a moral plea for the plain and unadorned; those titles were a giveaway, and even Hartley's preferred actors, some of them returning from film to film, seemed to err, or bend, toward a slender frailty. What would happen, I sometimes wondered, if Sylvester Stallone turned up on a Hartley project? Would the cameraman switch to a wider lens, or give a little whimper and run away?

Some of that thirst for simplicity survives in the latest film. "An honest man is always in trouble," one of the characters declares. That line first appeared in "Henry Fool" (1998), to which "Fay Grim" is a kind of mutant sequel. Back then, we followed the progress of the taciturn Simon Grim (James Urbaniak), whose poetry, reviled by many and posted by his sister Fay on the Internet, wound up winning the Nobel Prize. The Grims' life in Woodside, Queens, was unpoetic to a fault, dominated by their lodger, Henry Fool (Thomas Jay Ryan), a charismatic brute savant who eventually married Fay and fathered her only child, Ned (Liam Aiken).

Now Henry is missing, presumed by some to be dead. He fled the country after being accused of manslaughter, and Simon is serving a prison sentence for having abetted that flight. Fay remains as scatterbrained as ever, barely able to take stock of her son's misbehavior in school ("You're grounded, like, forever"), let alone of the wider warpings beyond. "Do we have like a map of the world or anything?" she asks Ned, who calmly produces a globe. In the days of "Henry Fool," Parker Posey was the sprite-in-residence to the art-house crowd; the last place I saw her was in "Superman Returns," and I'm not sure that her newfound prominence becomes her. Her ditherings can be a delight on the fringes of a film, but kookiness has a nasty habit of turning arch when bumped to center stage, and although she looks fabulous in "Fay Grim," striding about in lingerie and long coat, and despite one brilliantly dirty moment involving a vibrating cellphone, she seems just too feathery to hold together a movie that is, in any case, on the verge of flying apart.



Parker Posey in a sequel to Hal Hartley's "Henry Fool."

Hartley didn't merely direct this film. He also wrote, edited, and co-produced it, and apparently tried to cram into it everything that has consumed or appalled him in the years since "Henry Fool." The key is, as ever, literary: not Simon's verse, this time, but a stack of intimate journals left by the escaping Henry. Angus, the canny publisher, calls them "a self-perpetuating literature of obfuscation, hearsay, rumor, innuendo, and outright lies: a best-seller for sure." Such bookish jokes are not only the funniest touches in "Fay Grim," but also the most cinematic; Hartley feels at ease in this milieu, and Angus is a wonderful blend of the mournful and the direct. It is when the plot strays that problems flare. Two C.I.A. agents named Fulbright (Jeff Goldblum) and Fogg (Leo Fitzpatrick)—Hartley has always been a great namer—are equally gripped by Henry's confessions, believing them to be coded messages, possibly of treasonous intent. Mr. Fool, in short, was not just a bounder but a spy.

What follows is a parody of an international thriller. Henry, we learn, was up to no good in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and Cuba, and the movie follows suit by dropping into Paris and Istanbul. At one level, you have to admire the director's economy; anyone who can set a scene in an airport by filming nothing but its floor, then show no more of a plane than a couple of seats, has learned all there is to know about low-budget

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

cinema. The rhythm of suspense, on the other hand, strikes me as wholly unfakeable, and embarrassingly alien to Hartley's natural taste. We get gunfights shorn to a succession of blurred stills, we get blindfolds and bullet wounds, and we get Saffron Burrows as Juliet, an agent of the Israeli secret service. "So, is that like a bad thing?" Fay asks. If the movie kept pace with Fay's bafflement, all might have been well, and I was happy to hear Jeff Goldblum reel off reams of political paranoia at dazzling speed, like a court official in a Gilbert and Sullivan song. What happens, though, and what lures the film into disaster, is that Hartley lets slip his sense of humor (always his strongest asset) and begins to believe his own plot. Major characters get blown up, or else they say things like "I listened to you when I was in misery, when I was lost, and it helped me to see the light." Excuse me, is this a Hal Hartley movie or a church?

Expatriates are often impelled to anatomize their countrymen from a distance, and Hartley, who has made his home in Berlin since 2004, is no exception. The new movie reeks with dismay at American attitudes to other cultures; when Fay flies to Europe in search of Henry, she barely seems to notice what city she's in, and neither do we, not least because every location is filmed at the same nauseated tilt, as if we were onboard a ship. "Why is it, when someone starts talking about civilization, I hear the sound of machine guns?" Fay asks. It's a good, if naïve, question, but once the movie starts delving into Henry's involvement with Islamic jihad (I'm not kidding) all hope of an answer is lost. The movie dies, and with it goes one's hope that the whole thing might be a vast shaggy-dog story—that Henry's journals could be nothing but private ravings after all, and that we would end up, none the wiser, back in America. Hartley's imagination seems oddly shrunken and provincial when it roams abroad; on home turf, in Woodside, Queens, it comes to life.

How many Wilson brothers are there in the movie business? I can name three, but surely there must be a couple of quiet ones tucked away—a Kevin and a Willie, yet to spring themselves on an unsuspecting public. For now, we have to make do with "The Wendell Baker Story," directed by Luke and Andrew Wilson. Luke wrote the script, and he stars as Wendell. Halfway through, just as you're wondering if Owen—the most industriously laid-back of the Wilsons—has decided to skip the family reunion, up he pops, playing the head nurse of a retirement hotel. It's the one truly unpleasant role in the film, and you wonder how Owen got stuck with it. Did the brothers draw straws over breakfast?

Owen could have played Wendell Baker without breaking a sweat, although Luke does what Sinatra would have called a nice-'n'-easy job. Our hero is an amiable Texan loser with a girlfriend named Doreen (Eva Mendes) and a profitable line in selling fake driver's licenses to illegal immigrants. "Mexico is all the U.S. could've been," he says, musing, as ever, on the unfeasible. Wendell seems fond of pretty much everyone, with the knack of rising unbowed from any stumble. Even when arrested for the license scam and sent to jail, he smiles through the ordeal, merrily inducing high fives between the black inmates and the white supremacists. At this point, I suddenly recognized the presiding spirit of "The Wendell Baker Story." Some people make films in homage to Ingmar Bergman, others nod to the French New Wave, but only the Wilsons would think to follow in the footsteps of Burt Reynolds.

Wendell is released at last and offered employment, on parole, in the retirement hotel. Among the residents are Skip Summers (Harry Dean Stanton), Boyd Fullbright (Seymour Cassel), and Nasher (Kris Kristofferson), all of them with faces like dried-up riverbeds. Without warning, the film stops being a tale of feckless youth and turns into an admiring study of oldster hipness; believe me, once you've seen Harry Dean Stanton and Seymour Cassel go out to buy condoms and come back with the phone number of the sixteen-year-old girl who sold them, age will hold no further terrors. The ending is a dumb dream, insulting to the comic pathos that prevails elsewhere. We don't want these fellows to be rich and triumphant; we want them to share a peaceful beer, and the defining image of the movie is a shot of Doreen standing outside her office, in a twilight that feels both lustrous and dusty, waiting in vain for Wendell to pick her up. The Wilsons' venture was shot in Austin, the global center of slackerology, and has barely summoned the energy to leave the place. Two summers ago, it showed there at the South by Southwest Film Festival, then yawned and went back to sleep. Last October, it came out in Iceland. How cool is that? ♦

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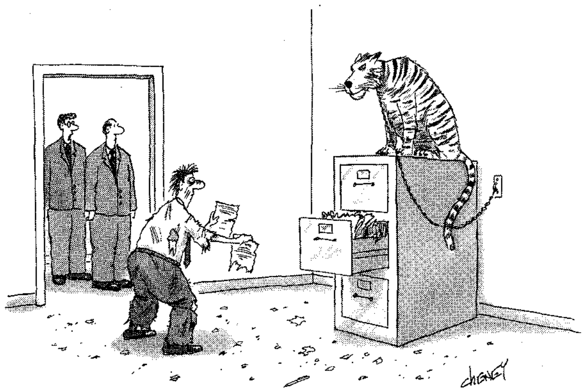
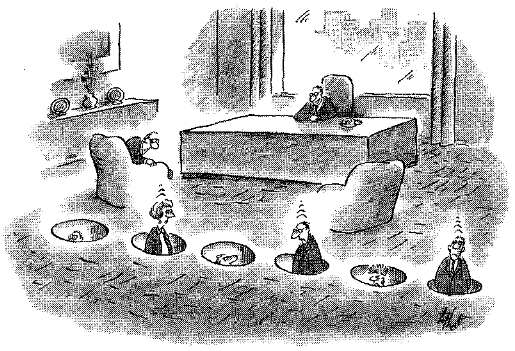
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Leo Cullum, must be received by Sunday, May 20th. Finalists in the May 7th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 4th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"You know, I'm gonna miss this when we go paperless."
Christopher Farber, Brooklyn, N.Y.



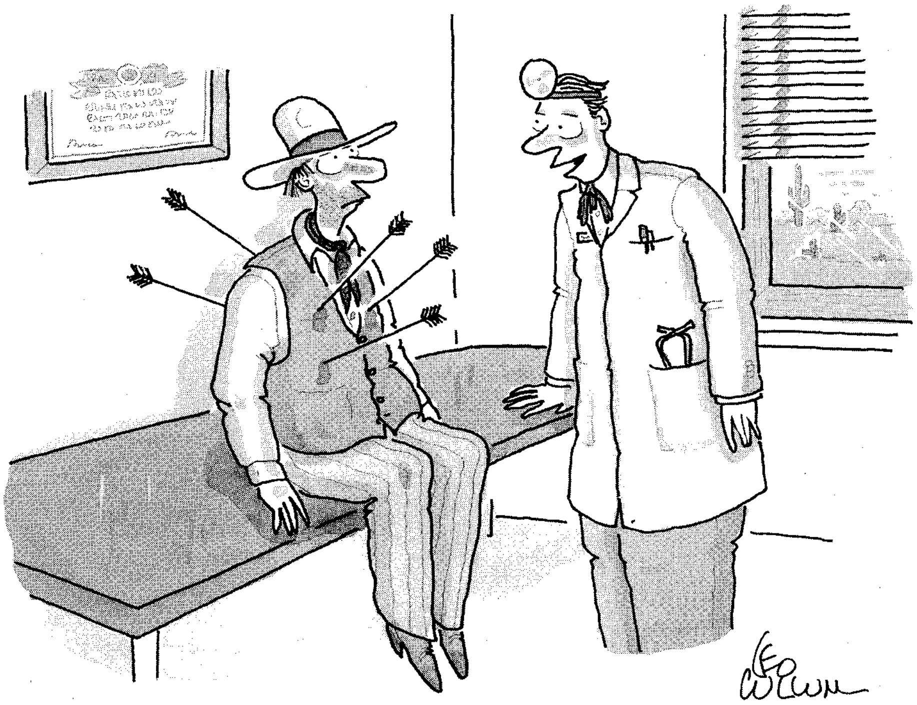
THE FINALISTS

"Go fetch your mallet, Wilkins—we'll play doubles."
Joel Brouwer, Tuscaloosa, Ala.

"I'm having my tech guys set them to music."
Laura Shanahan Egloff, Los Angeles, Calif.

"The negotiator for their union was very timid."
Arthur Litoff, York Springs, Pa.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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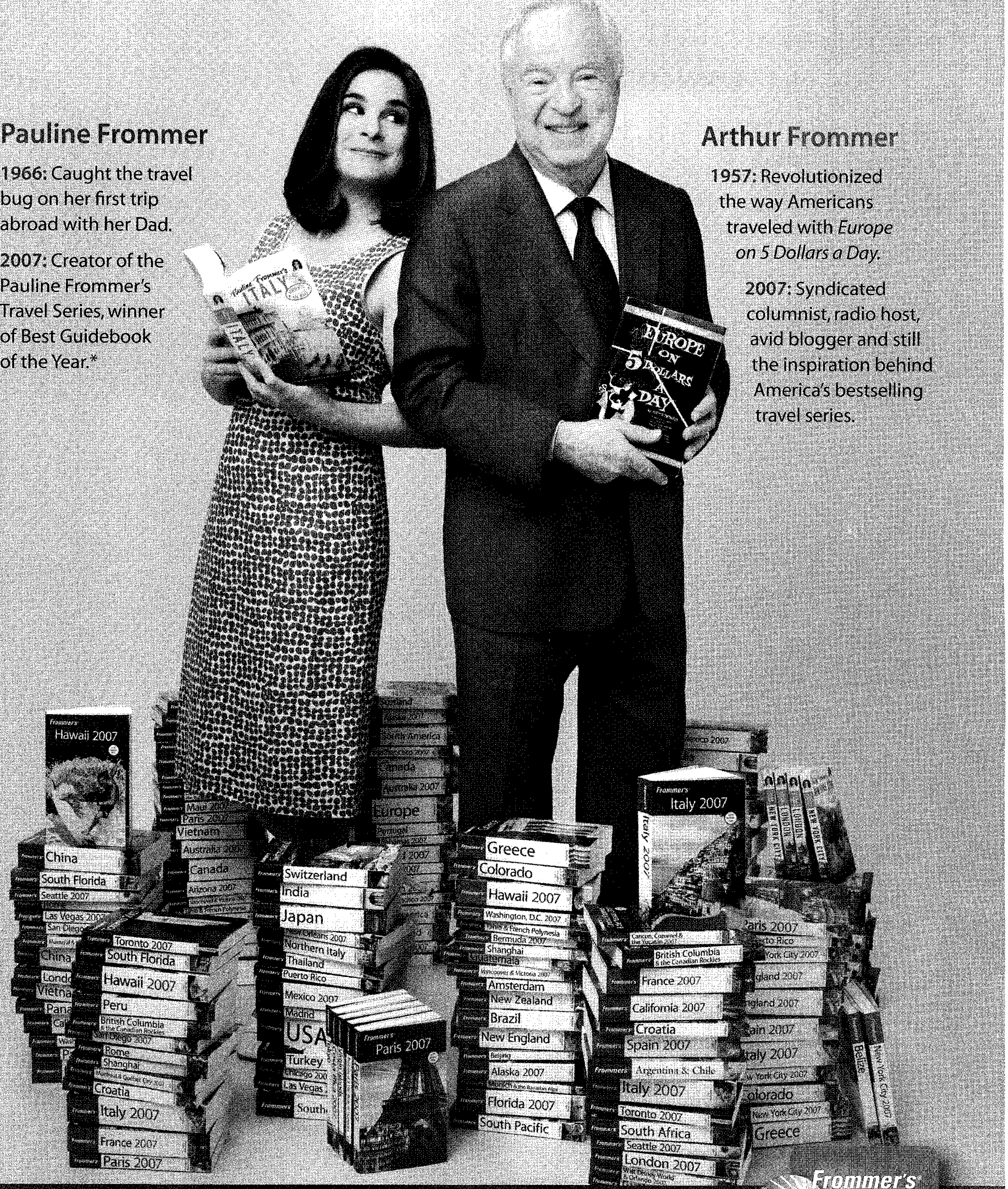
Pauline Frommer's Italy
Europe on 5 Dollars a Day
Frommer's Hawaii 2007
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Pauline Frommer

1966: Caught the travel bug on her first trip abroad with her Dad.

2007: Creator of the Pauline Frommer's Travel Series, winner of Best Guidebook of the Year.*

Arthur Frommer

1957: Revolutionized the way Americans traveled with *Europe on 5 Dollars a Day.*

2007: Syndicated columnist, radio host, avid blogger and still the inspiration behind America's bestselling travel series.

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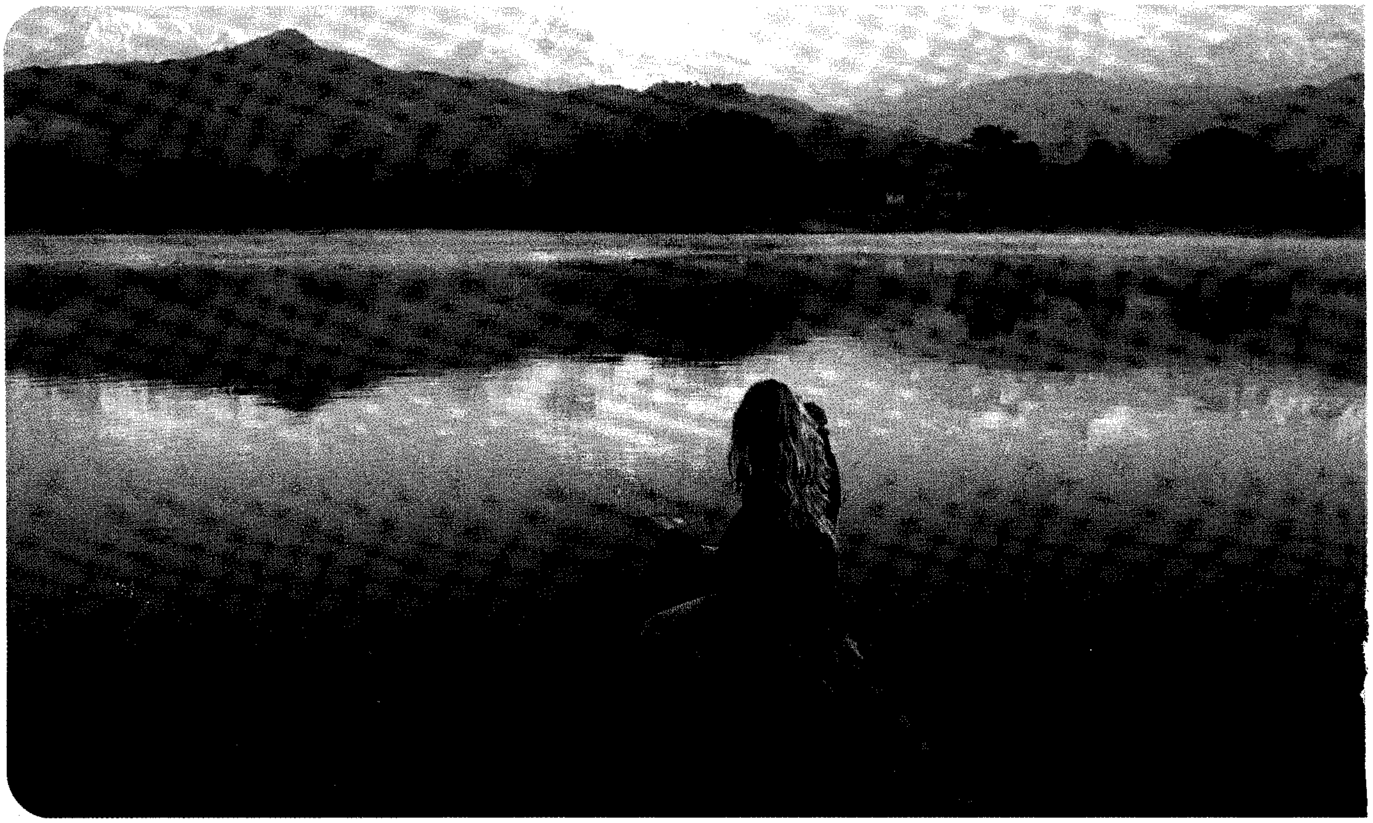
Who knew all those double lattes
would end up being so relaxing?



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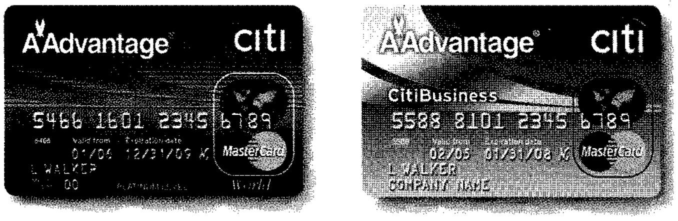

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